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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[“NONSENSE!” EXCLAIMED ERIC. “SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED—WHAT IS IT?”]

HILDA'S FORTUNES.

—o—

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE morning after the ball Ida St. John woke up with two very opposite feelings struggling for mastery. The one was happiness in the assurance of her engagement, the other was terror at having to inform her father of the existence of that engagement.

It would be wrong to imagine that she stood in habitual awe of Sir Douglas, for such was assuredly not the case. He was, as a rule, the most indulgent of fathers (when his studies left him time to remember his daughter's existence); but he had spoken so strongly regarding Lord Westlynn that she felt convinced she would have to encounter the most determined opposition to her betrothal. Well, she was strong enough to withstand it, she told herself, and having once given her pledge to Arthur, nothing in the world should induce her to recall it. She was of age, and therefore competent to follow her own wishes.

The Baronet had breakfasted long before

she made her appearance downstairs, so she had her meal alone—and it need hardly be said that, on this occasion, her ordinarily healthy appetite completely deserted her.

As soon as she had finished she went to the study, where she found her father absorbed in some manuscripts.

“Good morning, my dear!” he said, ceasing his occupation to kiss her. “How are you after your dissipation? It strikes me you look a little pale.”

“Do I?” with an assumption of indifference. “Oh, that is nothing. I am quite well.” A pause, during which she looked out of the window. “The ball was a very delightful one.”

“That's right; I am glad to hear it, but you must give me an account of all that happened some other time. Just now I am rather busy,” returning to his papers again.

Ida's first impulse was to accept the offered respite, and defer her communication, but second thoughts gave other advice. “There is no time like the present,” and if she did not take advantage of it her courage might ebb, and the opportunity would be lost.

“Papa!” she exclaimed, a half quaver discernible in her determined voice. “I want to speak to you—particularly.”

“Won't some other time do?” asked Sir Douglas, to whom the words meant nothing more than some feminine bit of gossip.

“No; some other time won't do. It must be now.”

“Oh, very well—go on”—pushing his papers on one side, and speaking resignedly.

But, thus bidden, Ida felt no inclination to “go on,” being seized with a quite unaccountable fit of nervousness, the like of which she never remembered to have experienced. She looked round, noticed how faded the curtains had become, and how threadbare the carpet looked with the sunlight falling upon its worn splendours of blue and gold, and then a sudden inspiration seized her, and she came to her father's side, and putting her arms round his neck, rubbed her cheek softly against his.

“Daddy dear,” she whispered, “do you love me very much?”

“Very much indeed, my darling,” he returned, with fervour.

“Then you wish for my happiness?”



"Certainly—it is my first consideration."
"Well, then, daddy dear, perhaps you won't be surprised to hear that—that somebody else loves me as well?"

He held her a little way off, and looked into her blushing face, which partly revealed her secret.

"So that is what you want to speak to me about—particularly!" he exclaimed, his accent a compound of pleasure and sadness. "Well, I suppose it is what might have been expected, but it comes upon me as a surprise, nevertheless."

He kissed her very tenderly, and sighed.

"Are you sorry, papa?"

"No, not exactly sorry, except in a selfish sense. I must reconcile myself to losing you."

"But you won't lose me, dear daddy. I shall always be your daughter, shall I not?"

He shook his head rather sadly.

"It is never the same, my dear. When once the bird has left the nest it never comes back again."

"Don't speak so sorrowfully!" she exclaimed, her eyes filling with tears. "I will not leave you at all unless you like."

"Would you not, darling? Well, I am pleased to hear you say it, but I should be undeserving of this love of yours if I let it stand in the way of a love still more powerful. No, you shall be the good wife of a good man, and I shall see my grandchildren growing up about me like the June rose in the garden grows round the old oak. But, remember, Ida, you have not yet told me who my future son-in-law is?"

With her face on her father's shoulder Ida whispered his name.

"Lord Dering!"

"Who?" cried Sir Douglas, starting from her as if she had stung him.

Ida repeated the name in trembling and terrified accents, for the expression on her father's face frightened her.

"Viscount Dering—Lord Westlynn's son—the future Earl of Westlynn!" muttered the Baronet, half to himself, while he stared at his daughter in what seemed like stupid bewilderment. "I have made a mistake—you have made a mistake!" he turned fiercely upon her. "You cannot mean what you say!"

"I do mean it," returned the girl, gathering some degree of firmness. "I say again I am engaged to Arthur, Lord Dering. Have you any objection to urge against him as my affianced husband?"

"Objection!" he laughed, harshly. "No, I urge no objection, but I tell you such an engagement is impossible—impossible!"

"Why impossible, papa?"

"Because I say it is!" he exclaimed, violently. "Is not that sufficient?"

"No, it is not. Remember I have given my promise."

"Folly—madness!"

"It is neither the one nor the other," retorted Ida, with spirit. "If you know anything against Arthur—"

"I know nothing either for or against him," interrupted Sir Douglas. "It is not the young man himself I abhor, but his name."

"Is this fair, papa; is it just?" questioned the girl. "I know you dislike the Earl, but must the sins of the fathers be visited on the children?"

"They must indeed—to the third or fourth generation!" he groaned, sinking down into a chair, and burying his face in his hands.

A slant of wintry sunlight fell upon him, showing how thickly the grey hairs had multiplied in his scanty locks. The sight touched Ida, and softened the retort trembling on her lips.

"Papa," she said, kneeling down beside him. "I love you very dearly—with my whole heart, and if I could help it I would never do anything to cause you a moment's trouble; but in this case the happiness of my whole future life is at stake, for without

Arthur I should be miserable. Do you understand?"

He bent his head, but did not speak.

"I have given Arthur my promise to become his wife," she went on, gathering courage as she proceeded, "and if I did not redeem it he would think me the falsest, ornellest of women. Think what a position I am in!"

"I see it," he muttered, in a low tone, "but for all that you must not marry him."

"Then you must give me the reason of your refusal!" she exclaimed, firmly. "I am not a child, and it is meet I should know the nature of the barrier between us."

"Do not ask me to tell you!" he implored, lifting his hands. "Oh! Ida, why will you not be content to trust to me? Have I ever given you reason to think me capable of betraying a trust?"

"No, papa, but this is an instance where I must use my own judgment to some extent. Besides, however painful the revelation of your motive may be, it would be preferable to ignorance."

"It would not—it would not! Was Eve happier after she had tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree?"

"No, but that was a different case, for she disobeyed the Divine command."

"And does not the Divine command tell you to obey your parents?"

"Yes, and it also says 'a man shall leave father and mother and cling to his wife.' The same rule holds good as regards a husband."

"Then you refuse to give up this young man?" exclaimed Sir Douglas, desperately.

"I do, unless you can show me sufficient cause to justify my desertion."

There was silence for a few minutes—silence so complete that the ticking of the clock, the falling of ashes from the grate, the Baronet's own hard breathing, seemed preternaturally loud. Suddenly Sir Douglas raised his head.

"A wilful woman must have her way," he said, sighing deeply, "and it seems that my only chance of saving you from a union against which nature recoils is the revelation of a secret that will shadow the rest of your life. Ida, I must speak to you on a subject that I have hitherto carefully avoided—I mean your mother."

He turned away his head, as if he dared not let her see his face, then continued,—

"Perhaps you do not know that my wife was far below me in social position, and that my marriage with her had the effect of alienating most of my relatives from me. I cared little enough for this, being passionately in love with your mother, who I thought returned my love."

"But why tell me this, papa?" queried the girl. "It surely has no bearing on Lord Dering."

"But it has, as you will presently hear. I was a devoted husband to your mother, and it is no exaggeration to say that I strove with all my power to make her happy. For some time I succeeded, but all at once a change came over her; she grew nervous and silent, and seemed unhappy, but when I questioned her she pretended to laugh at my fears, and declared there was nothing the matter with her. Well, I was called away from home to my mother's death-bed, and when I returned I found my wife gone."

"Gone!" echoed Ida, bewilderedly.

"Yes, she had eloped, leaving behind her a letter in which she confessed her love had gone from me, and ended by asking my forgiveness." A look of bitter hatred crossed the Baronet's face, and he added vehemently, "I did not forgive her, I never shall forgive her; she ruined my life, even while I had no other wish in my heart but to make her happy!"

Ida dared not say a word, but she kissed his hand, and the action recalled him from the past, whither his fancy had wandered.

"The companion of her flight," he added, in a low voice, "was the Earl of Westlynn."

A cry of horror broke from Ida's lips, and

she started to her feet and stood as if transfixed.

"Not that—not that!" she wailed, at last, flinging up both her hands, as if to shut out some awful vision.

"Yes," he said, very sadly, "that is the secret I would fain have hidden from you, but you would not let me. Remember, I wished to spare you."

She fell on her knees again, and hid her face in her hands. The shame and horror of the revelation well nigh overcame her—the more because in her wildest imaginings she had never dreamt that her father's aversion to Lord Westlynn was based on grounds of personal injury. She had been on the point of giving herself to a man whose father had betrayed her own mother! The idea was so awful that she could hardly realise it.

"Up to that time," continued the Baronet, too absorbed in his own reminiscences to heed her, "Lord Westlynn and I had been friends—great friends; he came to my house constantly, and although he and your mother were frequently together and seemed mutually attracted by each other, it never struck me to doubt their integrity, for my trust in both was perfect. This blow was therefore doubly hard to bear when it fell."

"Why didn't you tell him?" cried Ida, with a fierceness that sounded strange, coming from her young lips. "If I were a man and another man did me such an injury, I would make him atone with his life. It was cowardly to let him go unpunished."

"He was not unpunished, Ida. I waited awhile, and then I struck him in public, and we fought a duel at Blankenbompe. He was wounded—fatally, I believe—but in due time he recovered, and since then I have never set eyes on him, although we are such near neighbours. Are you surprised now that I am a recluse?"

She did not reply in words, but leaned her head on his breast, and gave way to a storm of sobs, whose violence almost frightened him. In a moment she comprehended how wasted his life had been, and how hardly fate had used him, and with the knowledge came a flood of purest womanly sympathy, in which her own troubles were, for the instant, forgotten.

How could she comfort him—she asked herself—how could she atone for her mother's cruelty?

Perhaps, in that moment of anguish, father and daughter were nearer together than they had been in their lives before.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN she had in some degree recovered from the shock of her father's revelation, Ida awoke to the realities of her own position, which were urgent enough to require immediate action. Unless he heard from her to the contrary, she knew Arthur would appear at the Manor House that same afternoon, and it was, above all, necessary that his visit should be prevented. She wanted to think out the situation quietly, or at least as quietly as was possible under the circumstances, for her temples were throbbing as if a dozen sledge hammers beat inside them, and every nerve was quivering with pain and excitement. She rose from her knees, and went upstairs to her own room, where she locked the door, and paced backwards and forwards with tightly clasped hands, and a face as pallid as the drapery of her bed.

Above all, the horror of knowing the nature of the barrier that kept her from Arthur, was an intensely human anguish at the thought that she and her lover were parted for ever—parted as surely as if an ocean rolled between them. Once she stopped on her weary march, and threw herself face downwards on the bed.

"Oh, Arthur—my love—my love!" she cried out, as if in that one name the keynote of her life was struck.

Poor Ida! Poor little brilliant butterfly—

with her saucy speeches, and her piquante beauty! Every coquetish evasion she had practised on Arthur was avenged tenfold now, for love had taken so entire possession of her heart that nothing short of the knowledge just given could have had power to triumph over it!

By-and-by, when she grew a little calmer, she began to think over what her best plan would be with regard to the Viscount. To tell him the nature of the gulf that divided them she felt was impossible, for how could she be the one to inform him of his father's guilt?

Long and anxiously she thought over the different ideas that presented themselves, and at last she went to her boudoir (which adjoined the bedroom) and sitting in front of her desk, wrote the following lines,—

"Since last night something has occurred which will prevent me from keeping the promise I gave you, and so I recall it, and leave you equally free. It will be better for both that we should not see each other for some time, and therefore I beg you not to make any attempt to obtain an interview with me. Nothing that you could say or do would induce me to become your wife. You may think this caprice; indeed, you may put what interpretation you will upon it, but this decision is final, and I cannot give you further explanation of the motive that guide me to it. It is sufficient that you and I are separated for all time; and I implore you, by the love you bore me, to accept my sudden change as imperative, and yet my own act, unbiassed by my father or anyone else. I have no more to say, except to hope that you will sometime be happy with a better wife than I should have made you."

"IDA ST. JOHN."

She sealed it, directed it, and then took it downstairs, and gave it to a footman, with strict injunctions to deliver it into the hands of Viscount Dering himself. Afterwards she went to the library.

"Papa," she said, controlling her voice by a great effort, and speaking quite steadily, "I have written a note to Lord Dering, breaking off my engagement, and as I have begged him not to come here, I think it unlikely that you will be troubled with him."

"I fear, Ida, that this is a very great trial for you," remarked her father, sorrowfully regarding her pale face. "You must remember, dear, that you are not the only one to whom sorrow comes."

She laughed a curiously hollow little laugh.

"I am perfectly aware of it, papa, but I really cannot see that the remembrance is one likely to afford me consolation. The fact that other people are in trouble makes me sympathise with them more now that I am in trouble myself, but it does not make my own trouble the less."

"I wish I could comfort you, my darling!"

"You can, papa." She came to his side, a feverish flush burning on her cheek, her fingers interlacing nervously with each other. "It is in your power to grant me a very great favour."

"Name it, Ida. You need not fear a refusal."

"I want you to take me abroad, where I shall see an entirely fresh set of faces, where even the language will be different, and nothing will remind me of—of what I have lost."

Sir Douglas pondered a few minutes. Reclass as he was, he hated the idea of leaving home, but his love for Ida made him at once decide in favour of her request.

"We will go, Ida, and I am entirely of your opinion that it will be the best plan. When would you like to start?"

"The sooner the better."

"Yes. Can you be ready by to-morrow?"

"Easily," she responded. "I shall not want to take much luggage, and Lucy is quick at packing, so there will not be the slightest difficulty."

"Now comes the question—where would you like to go?"

"Anywhere," she answered, indifferently, while her heart said,—

"Anywhere—anywhere—out of the world!"

"We will cross to Calais first, and then decide," observed Sir John, thoughtfully, and Ida kissed him and left the room.

Luncheon had not long been over when a visitor arrived, who sent in his card to the Baronet. Sir John, instead of tossing the card on one side, and saying he was "engaged," as was his wont, looked at the piece of pasteboard in some apprehension, fearing lest it might announce Lord Dering, but his terror was unfounded, for it bore the name of "Colonel Fanshaw."

"The gentleman begs you will see him, sir," added the footman, as he gave it.

"Show him in," said Sir Douglas, with a sigh of relief. He and Colonel Fanshaw had been friends many years ago, but they had not met for a long time, the interval having been spent by the latter on the Continent.

The two men greeted each other cordially enough, and after mutual inquiries on both sides Sir Douglas said,—

"You are just the very man I wanted to see."

The soldier looked a little startled.

"Indeed! In what way can I serve you?"

"Well, the fact is I and my daughter have made up our minds to go abroad to-morrow morning, and as the resolution is rather a sudden one, we have made no arrangements for our route or journey. I have not been on the Continent for many years, so that I know nothing whatever of the changes that must naturally have occurred since then, and of which you are doubtless cognisant."

"My dear St. John," exclaimed Colonel Fanshaw, heartily, "I am delighted to hear you intend coming out of your shell, and equally delighted that I am able to be of some use to you and your very charming daughter, whom I had the pleasure of seeing last night."

"What! Were you at the ball, then?"

"I was. I thought I should like to see some of the old faces once more, so I went. In addition to the old ones I saw some new ones, notably your daughter's and Lord Dering."

Sir Douglas winced at the latter name, but took no notice of its being coupled with that of Ida.

"Can you recommend us some nice quiet place, with a few English comforts about it, either in France or Belgium?" he said, bringing his visitor back to the point.

"What a very John Bullish way of putting it! As it happens, I can recommend you such a place—a chateau in the south of France, that belonged to an Englishman, and therefore has a sprinkling of English comforts about it—such as carpets on the floors and open fireplaces. It is charmingly situated, and will suit you exactly, I am sure."

"But where is its owner?"

"Away. In point of fact, my dear St. John, its owner is myself, and I am delighted to have the opportunity of serving you. The chateau, left to itself, would get dirty and damp and dismal, and I should have a month's work in putting it straight; whereas, if you and Miss St. John are there, the domestics will be kept to their work, and everything will go on all right."

"You are very good," said the Baronet; "but I really don't like the idea of turning you out of your own house."

"Nonsense! If you have scruples of that kind the only way in which I can remove them is to preserve the right of coming to the chateau and occupying my own suite of rooms while you are there—that is if I should wish to do so. Does that put matters on a proper footing?"

"Yes. Still I feel we shall be under an obligation to you."

"Not at all, my dear fellow; the obligation is on the other side. And now let me give

you full directions as to route, &c., and afterwards I will telegraph to my housekeeper at the chateau, and tell her to have everything in readiness to receive you, so that you can go as soon as you like."

He left the house about half-an-hour later, and then Sir Douglas sent for his daughter and informed her of the plans he had made.

"Do you not think we are very fortunate?" he asked, as he concluded.

Ida hesitated before replying.

"I suppose we are—in a sense," she said at last; "but, all the same, I would rather have rented apartments from a stranger than have been under an obligation to Colonel Fanshaw."

"That is rather ungracious after his kindness, is it not?"

"Perhaps it is, but I cannot help saying it; for, do you know, papa, I have a sort of prejudice against this man."

"Prejudice! What has caused it?"

"I don't know; it is a case of—"

"I do not like thee, Doctor Fell, The reason why, I cannot tell,"

I suppose," she answered, with attempted playfulness that was not altogether successful. "There are some people who inspire one with an aversion which one cannot explain."

"Strange!" murmured her father. "Fanshaw used to be a great favourite in society when I first knew him years ago, and even now he strikes me as fascinating."

"That is true, but the fascination is an evil one—at least, it seems so to me."

"You are fanciful and nervous just now," observed the Baronet, with an indulgent smile; "and—let me add—ungrateful, too. However, I have accepted Fanshaw's proposal, so it only remains for you to get your packing done, and be ready to start by nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

Ida withdrew without saying more; indeed, she felt that there was truth in what her father said, and that her mistrust of Fanshaw was as unreasonable as it was intangible. She knew nothing of him, but if Sir Douglas, with whom he had once been intimate, was satisfied as to his integrity, surely she had no cause of complaint.

And yet, in spite of that other deeper and more stinging pain that tormented her, she could not divest herself of a latent fear that evil might come of this offered hospitality of Fanshaw's.

She herself packed most of the things she intended taking with her, for in her present state of mind occupation of some kind was a necessity, and prevented her from brooding over her misery as much as she would otherwise have done.

For almost the first time in her life sleep refused to visit her pillow when she sought it that night, and she passed the weary hours tossing restlessly to and fro, while the faces of Lord Dering and Colonel Fanshaw seemed to mock her from the darkness.

She rose the next morning weary and unfreshed, and feverishly desirous of getting away from the Manor House, and its painful associations. While she and her father were at breakfast Colonel Fanshaw came in.

"I find from this morning's post that I shall have to go to town to-day," he observed, after greeting them, "so, if you do not mind, I will do myself the pleasure of travelling with you."

"We shall be delighted," answered Sir Douglas, who, as a matter-of-fact, dreaded the idea of a *tête-à-tête* journey with his daughter, and therefore cordially welcomed the addition to their party.

Ida was very silent when they were in the railway carriage, and although the Colonel did his best to engage her in conversation, his efforts were unavailing, so at last he left her to her own taciturnity, and devoted himself to her father.

He dined with them at the Charing Cross Hotel, and saw them into the train an hour afterwards. As he said good-bye, and the

engine steamed slowly out of the station, Ida exclaimed with energy,—

"Papa, I am glad Colonel Fanshaw left us when he did. If he had been with us an hour longer I really think I should have been rude to him!"

"I cannot say I think you show good sense by such a remark," said Sir Douglas, with a touch of severity.

Ida bore the rebuke with becoming humility, and settled herself in her furs without speaking, while Sir Douglas read one of the magazines by the aid of a reading lamp he had already fixed above him.

The mail went steaming on through the December darkness—every minute putting another mile between Ida and her lover. She shivered once as the thought struck her, and then murmured,—

"Better so—better so!"

Dover was at length reached, and as the night was rather a boisterous one, Sir Douglas decided to defer crossing until the next day, and to stay the night at the "Lord Warden" Hotel.

To Ida the delay was annoying. The feverish unrest of sorrow was upon her, and so long as she remained in England she was never free from the idea that she might possibly meet Arthur. She strenuously opposed her father's suggestion that they should remain another day in Dover, and by dint of some persuasion got him on board the steamer the next morning. Fortunately they had a pretty smooth passage, and reached Calais in about two hours. Then came a hurried lunch at the station, a taking of tickets, and seeing to luggage, a short journey by train, a change, and then a longer journey, and a final arrival at a small quiet station just as it grew dark.

A carriage was waiting for them—they had previously telegraphed the probable hour of their arrival—and into this Ida, her father, and her maid mounted, and were driven slowly along an indescribably and lonely and dreary road, which seemed as if it would never end.

At length, however, the carriage drew up in front of some iron gates, and, when they were opened, proceeded up an avenue of leafless trees, and paused in front of a long, low, dark pile of buildings, which was sparsely illuminated by an oil lamp in the hall.

Sir Douglas alighted, and helped his daughter out, and as she stood in front of a great oaken portal, studded with heavy iron nails, and glanced up at the dark and frowning facade, a peculiar feeling that was not exactly terror, but partook of the nature of superstitious dread, came over her, and she shuddered as if with repulsion.

"It looks like a prison!" she said to herself. "I wish—oh, how I wish we had never come here!"

CHAPTER XX.

It is hard to describe the state of complete mystification into which Verrall was thrown by the statement of the woman he had so long believed to be his mother. No doubt that she was really his parent had ever crossed his mind; and yet directly he heard her declaration he was convinced that she spoke the truth, and accepted unhesitatingly the position her words gave him—that of a foundling, whose parents, either from shame, or some other reason, had cast off the responsibility his birth entailed on them.

He pondered carefully over what she had said, but it told him very little, for her own knowledge had confessedly been very limited, and she seemed to have no letters or papers by which he might obtain a clue as to who he really was.

The blow to his pride was a very bitter one—he was nobody's child—a waif thrown on the wide sea of humanity, and liable to be drifted hither and thither at the mercy of the waves. Hitherto, although his birth had been humble enough, he had prided himself on having descended from a line of honest yeomen, and if he had not gloried in his

ancestors, had, on the other hand, no cause to be ashamed of them.

Now all was different, and he involuntarily bowed his head, as he thought with bitterness, that he really had no right to the name he bore, that he was probably one of those unhappy children whose mother's hand has worn no wedding-ring.

He roused himself from his reveries to go upstairs and see the dead woman, on whose behalf the last sad offices had been performed, and he took with him a handful of white geranium that some neighbour had brought in, and which Eric scattered over the still form, in its shrouding drapery.

She looked very peaceful, with her hands clasped over her breast; and tears that were no shame to his manhood rose in the young man's eyes as he bent down, and reverently kissed the placid brow. She had been kind and good to him, and if she had not bestowed upon him the tenderness of a mother it was rather because such tenderness was not in her nature, than that she begrudged giving it to the boy who was not her son.

Nurse Martin had gone, and the soldier was in the house by himself. He thought it a good opportunity for looking through his foster-mother's papers, and seeing if there were any amongst them relating to himself, as the sooner it was done the better, so he took downstairs the desk in which he knew Mrs. Verrall had been accustomed to keep old letters, or any such documents as she had thought worth preserving.

She had been a very methodical woman—almost old-maidish in her extreme neatness and love of order. Eric was touched anew as he saw the little packets of bills, duly dated, and tied together with narrow black ribbon, and the old letters, with their pathetic endorsements. "From my husband before our marriage." Almost the first thing he saw was the dead woman's will, which was put up in an envelope, and directed to himself. She had not had much to leave, but what little she had was bequeathed to her "dear adopted son, Eric Verrall." After he had put this carefully on one side, and burned the letters, according to what he believed would have been her wish, he set himself to search for any scrap of writing that might have been sent to her by the mysterious "Miss Jones," who had brought him to her.

The search was entirely unsuccessful. There was not the smallest vestige of a clue to be obtained, and Eric finally locked the desk, and took it upstairs, much disappointed at his failure.

As he put it back in its former place, he bethought himself of a draw in the top of the chest of drawers, that Mrs. Verrall had invariably kept locked, and thinking there might be a possible chance of finding in it what he wanted he opened it, and looked over its contents. They consisted chiefly of odd bits of ribbon, laces, and the few small attempts at finery women of Mrs. Verrall's position permit themselves, but in one corner was a paper parcel, neatly folded and sealed. On it was a label, with these words,—

"The frock worn by Eric when he came to me."

Verrall shook out the enclosure—a shabby, little woollen frock, much worn, the pattern of which was composed of a small green check or tartan. It was in no wise peculiar, unless indeed the fabric might be considered rather uncommon as to pattern. Eric wondered at first why Mrs. Verrall had not also preserved the hat and jacket he presumably wore, but a little reflection suggested that these two articles of apparel were probably worn out with constant use, whereas he had, most likely, outgrown the frock.

It was not much of a clue, but such as it was it might prove useful, so he put it away in its wrapper again, and then went downstairs, where he spent one of the most miserable evenings of his life.

The two following days were occupied in arranging Mrs. Verrall's affairs, and in

making preparations for the funeral, and on the third day she was buried, Eric following the coffin as chief and only mourner.

At the end of the week he returned to Dering Court, and on arriving at the station found Arthur waiting for him with the dog-cart. Occupied as he was with his own affairs it was impossible to help noticing the change that had taken place in the formerly *débonnaire* young Viscount, and when they had taken their seats in the cart he spoke of it.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" he said, with friendly anxiety. "You look pale and haggard—downright ill, in fact."

"Do I?" with a reckless laugh. "I expect I've been drinking too many brandies and sodas. You see there is no one to pull me up when you are out of the way."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Eric, speaking the more freely, because there was no groom to overhear them; "something has happened,—what is it?"

Arthur did not reply for a moment, but flicked his mare with the whip, which had the effect of making her start off at a gallop. When he had pulled her in, he said,—

"Ah—it is the old story—the story that is about as old as the creation, I suppose. A woman's falseness and a man's faith."

"Do you mean that something has gone wrong with Miss St. John?"

"I mean that she has behaved about as badly as it is possible for one of her sex to behave," returned Arthur, savagely. "She first of all accepted me as her affianced husband, and the next day wrote to me a letter calmly informing me that she had altered her mind, and a marriage between us was impossible. What do you think of that?"

"Perhaps she did not mean it—perhaps—" "Oh! but she did mean it. She was quite in earnest, I assure you. When I received the letter I was almost wild with rage, but during the night I thought over her capricious ways, and wondered if she could possibly be playing some trick on me. It was a very forlorn hope, but I resolved to try it, so the next morning I rode over to the Manor House, determined to see her, and have it out with her. When I got there I learned that Sir Douglas and Miss St. John had left home some hours before, that their absence would probably be a lengthened one, and their address had not been left with the servants. What do you think of the matter now?"

"That her father refused his consent, and in giving you up she was acting in obedience to his wishes," promptly responded Verrall.

"Yes; that was my opinion at first, but her own words forbade my entertaining it. The night I asked her to marry me she declared herself ready to brave her father's anger, and in the letter she sent me she said her sudden change was her own act, unbiassed by Sir Douglas or anyone else; so what can I think, except that she does not care for me? And yet"—added the young man, with a groan—"I would have staked my life on her truth, for if ever eyes said they loved, hers did on the night of the W— ball!"

Verrall put his hand on his shoulder. "Be a man, Dering, and don't think anything more about her except as a coquette, who is callous to men's feelings in her love of admiration," he said, hardly knowing in what way to administer comfort. Personally he was not much attracted by Miss St. John. She was not the kind of woman he admired, and he was quite sincere in saying he believed her to be a coquette, for her former conduct towards Arthur fully warranted that opinion.

Lord Dering moodily shook his head.

"She is not the only woman in the world," added Eric; "and there are dozens of girls, equally beautiful, who will be glad enough to console you."

"All very fine, Verrall, but it just happens that she is the one woman in the world for me, and I don't care twopence for all the rest of them put together. I daresay I shall get over it," he went on, with a miserable

attempt at cheerfulness. "I am not the only man who has been jilted, and there are hundreds of things to live for, besides a woman's love, only I can't see them just now."

"Certainly a woman's love is the thing best worth living for," said Eric, gravely, "but by that I mean a good, true, trustworthy woman."

"Ah! but are there any good, true, and trustworthy women? I am inclined to doubt the existence of those good qualities in the feminine sex generally. You see the evil of it is, that when one has once been betrayed one does not care to risk another similar experience."

Verrall did not try to administer a second dose of consolation, for he was wise enough to see that silence would be much discreeter. Gay, careless as Arthur was, and shallow as some of his acquaintances believed him, he was nevertheless capable of deep and sincere affection; and his love for Ida had been no idle fancy, born of a boy's romance, but the one great passion of his life. Possibly—nay, probably—he would marry, for it behoved him to provide an heir to the earldom, but it would be in no other woman's power to awake within him the same kind of love he had borne Ida St. John.

It was not until they had reached the Court, and were sitting together in the library, that Verrall related the strange news that had been his adopted mother's dying bequest. Miserable as Arthur was at the disastrous termination of his love-suit, he was quite capable of sympathising with his friend's perplexing situation.

"Don't let it bother you, old fellow!" he said, after listening to the recital. "A man is liked and trusted for himself, not for his parents, so what does it matter whether you are the son of Mrs. Verrall or the son of somebody else?"

"Nobody else, you should say," amended Eric, with a touch of bitterness. "However! I did not tell you this in order to complain, or in order to enlist your sympathy, but simply because I wanted everything to be plain and aboveboard with us. I don't wish to pose for somebody I am not."

"But you surely did me the justice to believe that *nothing* you could tell me would alter my friendship for you?" said Arthur, reproachfully.

For answer Verrall put out his hand, and clasped that of the Viscount. There was in that clasp the assurance of an affection which the psalmist tells us "passes the love of women!"

"I want you to advise me," continued Eric, after a pause. "What shall I do with regard to my mother's disclosure?"

"Say nothing about it. No one is injured by your silence, and I really don't see how you could set about finding out the secret of your birth. You have no clue to start with."

"Except the frock I told you of."

"And what good is that likely to do you? You cannot go about the world wearing the frock on your sleeve. If you don't wish to let the matter rest put an advertisement in the papers, containing the date of your birth, and the date of your being sent to Mrs. Verrall, and ask anyone who can give you any information concerning a 'child named Eric' to write to you. If you get no answer, take my advice and forget that you ever heard Mrs. Verrall's statement."

Eric was inclined to think this was, indeed, the most sensible plan to adopt, so he at once drew up the advertisement, and sent it to most of the morning papers, with a request that it might be inserted immediately. Two days later it appeared, and he waited with an anxious heart to see if it would evoke a response.

It can hardly be said that he dared to hope, and yet when two morning's posts came in without bringing him what he looked for, it must be confessed he was disappointed.

(To be continued.)

BUT NOT OUR HEARTS.

CHAPTER VII.

A FORTNIGHT later Paul stood in the trophy-decked hall of his old home, throwing hungry looks through the open door, at the Chase, and avenue, and glimpse of blue dancing waters.

It was his last day at Temple Dene. The whole morning he had been busy packing up his belongings, and the few trinkets and heirlooms that he was to keep; and now that was finished, and he was free to wander about, and say farewell to each familiar nook and corner. How hard it was, now that the time had come, to say adieu to the old place, that seemed like a friend to the man who had been born 'neath its timeworn roof. How hard to have to turn his back on all the scenes with which he had been familiar since earliest childhood—to go out and toil and toil, with no home to come to during his brief spells of leave, and no nest to bring his bonnie bird to! It was another's now. The grand old house, the massive plate, the family portraits, the armour worn by his ancestors in many a furious fray, the queer antiques and nick-nacks, his servants, and even his horse.

At the thought of her he went down to the stables, after filling his pockets with sugar, and plucking two or three great juicy plums, from which he carefully extracted the stones. A beautiful head was thrust over the door at the first sound of his voice. "My beauty," he murmured, stroking her head, "here are the last dainties I shall ever bring you."

The animal whinnied with delight, and rubbed her nose against his shoulder ere she partook of the goodies. He watched her till the last bit was consumed; and then, putting both arms round her glossy neck, he leant his head against it, and when he raised it there were the mark of tears on the satiny skin.

"Good-bye, lass," he said, in an unsteady tone, "good-bye. I have to turn out a pauper. May none of the hard knocks I shall meet with fall to your share, my bonny bluebell. Good-bye," and, turning away without one backward look, he strode back to the hall.

A slight figure rose from the depths of a great antique armchair, and the next moment Opal was folded to his breast.

"It was very good of you to come, my dearest!" he whispered, after a long silence, which had been full of pain to both of them. "Leaving with you will rob the wrench of parting of half its pain."

"I hope so, love. Oh! Paul," and again with that little cry the sunny head sank down on his breast. She felt for him so deeply. If she could only soften his sorrow and regret, only make the trial less hard and heavy for him to bear!

"Paul, can I do anything to lighten this grief?" she asked, raising her sweet eyes to his, swimming in tears.

"Yes," he answered softly, pressing her closer to his bosom, "love me."

"I do, I do, with my heart's best affection," she cried.

"Then I am happy," he replied, smiling down on the lovely, upraised face. "Your love has power to charm away all sorrow, and make me happier than the greatest king."

"I am so glad," she sighed.

"And yet you sigh."

"With content only, my dear one, to think that I can make you happy, though you lose all else in life."

"You can! With your love I should be happy a beggar and rich; without it miserable—a sultan and poor."

"Ah!" she said, if for the first time understanding what her love was to him, how boundless a blessing, how inestimable a treasure!

"Now let us take our last look," and hand-in-hand they went from room to room, through corridors and galleries and quaint passages, until they found themselves in the hall again.

"Now for Mrs. Marshall," and together they sought her sanctum.

"Oh, Master Paul, Master Paul, I shall never get over this day. To think you as I nursed a baby, and dandled many a time, must leave the Dene, give it up to strange hands, quit your own home. Oh! I never, I never," wailed the good woman, sobbing loudly, and making liberal use of a handkerchief as big as a moderate-sized tablecloth.

"The ups-and-downs of fortune," he returned, with an affectation of lightness he did not feel. "I go out and another comes in—one perhaps more worthy to fill the place than myself."

"No, no," she protested. "You are a Chichester, one of the old stock, while he —;" words seemed to fail her, and she had recourse again to the leviathan handkerchief.

"He will do more good on the estate than I could," continued Paul, consolingly. "He has more money."

"And less heart," sobbed the disconsolate cook.

"I don't think that. I am sure he is a generous, right-minded man, and that everything will flourish in his hands."

"I hope so, sir, I am sure."

"So do I, and I wish you a long life, and a merry one in his service."

"Thank you, sir, kindly."

"And now—good-bye."

"Good—good-bye, Master Paul," she sobbed, with renewed vigour, and gasped between her sobs, "May I make so bold as to ask if I may kiss you just once for old time's sakes?"

"Certainly," and Paul stooped and received the caress offered by the faithful old soul, and then Opal was favoured in like manner, after which they adjourned to the servants' hall, where all were assembled, from Stony Benson to frosty-headed Jem, and there he bade farewell to his people, and shook hands with each one, including Plague, Pestilence, and Famine, each of whom wept a little in a decorous manner.

"Look after Bluebell well, Ferrars," said the young fellow, as he clasped the antique stable-boy's horny hand.

"I will, sir, never fear. I'll look arter 'er as if she wur a 'uman babbey you'd left to my charge. She shall never want for nothink whiles Jem Ferrars owns a brass fardin'."

"That's right. Good-bye all."

"Good-bye, sir, good-bye. God bless you," responded many voices, and scarcely an eye was dry; even in Stony Benson's fishy orb sparkled the suspicion of a tear.

"I am glad that is over," ejaculated Paul, with a sigh of relief, as he stepped out; and drawing his companion's hand through his arm sauntered away slowly to the Rest.

"Yes. Partings are very trying."

"They are, indeed."

"And circumstances made this doubly so."

"Yes," with another sigh.

"Have your things been sent to the Blue Dragon yet?"

"No. Fred takes them over to-night."

"I hope you will be comfortable there."

"I am sure to be so. Mine host, Dick Riveller, has good wines; and his wife, the buxom Nancy, is a good cook, and you know she was maid to my mother and deeply attached to her, so she will leave no stone unturned to make me comfortable."

"I am so glad to hear that."

"Little darling!" he rejoined, pressing the hand that rested lightly on his arm against his side, "you are always thinking of my comfort."

"Yes, and I only wish I could ensure it, and that I could have asked you to the Rest. But, as you know, you would not be very comfortable there. Our *menage* is such a limited one," she added, in order that it might not appear that she was grumbling.

"Don't distress yourself, dearest!" he exclaimed, quickly. "Much as I should enjoy staying under the same roof that shelters you, I would not think for a single instant of in-

conveniencing you, even if your *menage* were a different one. I really shall be jolly at the Dragon. It is a quaint, comfortable place, and you know that even were it not so all sailors are used to roughing it."

"Yes, I know that."

"Then brighten up, and cheer me with some sunny smiles, and I shall expect to-night after tea"

prettiest songs."

"Of course I will, dear. We all intend to do our best to cheer you, and make you forget your sorrows."

And they did. Ruby had quite a grand tea prepared, with some beautiful fruit Paul had sent, his last gift from the Temple Dene garden, and a huge cake she had made and covered with white sugar, on which in pink letters, large and staring, was a great "Welcome," peculiarly attractive to the boys, who swallowed their bread-and-butter with awful rapidity in order to be ready for the cake.

After tea Billie brought a box containing a toad to show Chichery his last pet, and Bertie exhibited his tortoise, which had just returned after an absence of six weeks, that had caused much anxiety; and Blackie induced Paul to make him a Turk's head on a willow sapling, and Bobbie gravely consulted him as to the advisability of giving an antibilious pill, cut up into small pieces, to his goldfish, who had shown symptoms of sickness.

Then Opal sang; and he, sitting beside her, listening to the fresh, sweet, tuneful voice, forgot his sorrows, and felt that nothing in the world equalled the possession of a true woman's heartfelt love.

"Will you sing now, Ruby," asked her sister, after a while.

"Yes," she answered, at once putting down the work she was occupied with, a petition for the Bevoirs ball. "What shall I sing?"

"Anything you like."

And she began in full, rich tones,—

"It was not in the winter
Our loving lot was cast.
It was the time of roses
We pluck'd them as we past.
That cheerful season never frown'd
On early lovers yet.
Oh, no, the world was newly crown'd,
With flowers when first we met."

"You have a remarkably fine voice?" observed Paul.

"You flatter me," she replied, with a sweeping courtesy.

"Not at all. If you don't find a rich husband you might make a fortune as a singer."

"Thanks for the suggestion, but I prefer the rich spouse; and I am hoping all sorts of things from this ball at Blacklands."

"I suppose so. Mr. Spragg ought to feel honoured."

"I daresay he is accustomed to being feted and made much of. When does he come, Paul?"

"To-morrow, and with him a whole army of upholsterers and workmen of all sorts and kinds."

"Does he mean to modernise and spoil the dear old place?" asked Opal, with a pained look.

"By no means. His great ambition is to have everything as antique as possible. What is worn or shabby is to be replaced by new things of ancient shape, form, hue, and design. The repairs are to be made without altering or injuring the venerable aspect of the structure."

"I am glad of that. It would be a pity to destroy it by modern innovations."

"Yes, and Spragg is decidedly of the same opinion. He intends to keep everything as it has been for generations past. You know he has taken all the servants on, and is quite distressed at having to keep a nineteenth-century French cook. But he has promoted Mrs. Marshall to the dignity of lady housekeeper; and anyway I think she would not be equal to

sending up a dinner turned out as he would require it."

"Hardly," agreed Ruby. "Perhaps, after all, we won't find the new man such a Goth as we fancy him to be."

"I daresay you won't, and you will have to make the best of him, Goth or no Goth."

"I suppose we shall."

"Decidedly. It will be to your advantage to do so."

"What, Paul!" she cried, with a merry laugh, "are you becoming an interested individual, and after years of indifference, suddenly blossoming into a mercenary man, with an eye to the main chance?"

"Circumstances alter cases," he replied, sentimentally. "When a man has plenty of this world's goods he can afford to be disinterested and careless; when he is one remove from a pauper it behoves him to keep his eyes wide open, and not let a single chance slip."

"I see. And you think Washington C. Spragg might give you a chance?"

"I think he might give you a chance, Duchess," he replied pointedly, letting his eyes dwell on the handsome dusky face.

"Ah, I see," she said again.

"Opal," he continued, patting the little hand that nestled so confidently in his, "has chosen 'love in a cottage' with—"

"A man one remove from a pauper," put in Ruby, roguishly.

"Exactly so," he assented calmly, giving the white digits he held an extra tender squeeze; "therefore she will not want any chances, as her fate is sealed."

"How do you know she will not?" demanded her sister daringly.

"I am certain of it."

"Don't be too sure. She may wish to enter the lists, and tilt for the honour of becoming Mrs. Mummy."

"Hardly. What do you say, sweetheart?"

"That I don't want to tilt for anyone but you, Paul."

"And you would fight for me?"

"To the death," she answered, with an energy that was absolutely startling in one so gentle and quiet, while her blue eyes sparkled and glowed, showing how intense was the feeling she bore him.

"I hope it will never come to that," he smiled.

"I hope not," said the youngest sister, with a comical grimace. "Just fancy Opal dragging some other woman round the arena by the hair of her head, and finally giving her the *coup de grace* by plunging a great dagger down—down into the depths of the heart that had dared to beat warmly for her own particular private property—Lieutenant Paul Costello Chichery."

"Don't be absurd," expostulated Miss Vane. "Where does the absurdity come in? You declare valiantly that you would fight for his lordship 'to the death,' and then you abuse me for suggesting that you might dispose of a rival in the way so graphically described by my humble self."

"I did not mean that I would fight in that way exactly."

"Really? I wonder what you did mean? At any rate, I am pretty certain that you would run away or faint if you saw any fighting going on."

"I daresay I should," she acknowledged, frankly. "I am a sad coward."

"Quite right, too," said Paul, warmly. "I like to see a girl soft and womanly, cowardly rather than fearless. The emancipated 'she' of the present day is far too manly and independent to suit the taste of most men. I can do all the fighting, and you may be as timid as you please."

"Bravo!" cried the irrepressible one.

"What a well-matched pair you will be! Quite a 'Jack Spratt and his wife' sort of couple—a pattern for all married folk to copy and study. I shouldn't be surprised if you win the fitch of bacon!"

"Neither should I," said Opal, quietly.

"Nor I," echoed Paul, as he rose to go. "We won't have much to quarrel about, for her will shall be mine."

"And mine yours," she interrupted, quickly.

"So you see, Miss Ruby, we may win the fitch, and if we do I promise you you shall be asked to dine off it."

"Thanks. I accept the invitation, and hope you will have broad beans as well. I have a weakness for them."

"Certainly. The repast shall be magnificent."

"You will come again soon, Paul?" whispered Opal, as she stooped clasped in his arms under the friendly shade of the gaint laurels, for the moon was up—round, full, resplendent, and its silvery rays made night as light as day. "Your time is short now. I want to see all I can of you."

"I shall be here directly after breakfast," he replied, promptly. "Every day we must spend together now, as my absence must be a long one."

"Yes," she sighed; but he stooped and kissed the quivering lips, and the sigh changed to a smile ere he left her, with a last lingering, fond embrace, to go to the galleried, gabled, queer old hostelry.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next two or three weeks were the happiest of Opal's life, and perhaps, too, of her lover's. They put aside all thoughts of the parting that was drawing so near, and gave themselves up to the delight of enjoying each other's society.

Every day they spent wandering about the fair country, walking to the Chimes, famed for their picturesque beauty, visiting every nook and corner of the country—the saying adieu, she carrying in her mind pleasant memories of beautiful scenes. Often they would seat themselves on great boulders, and look across the open stretches of honey-scented, heather-clad moorland, almost fancying themselves in Scotland; and talk about their future, weaving bright webs of imagination, picturing perfect bliss in their married life, without any of the pains and penalties which fall to the lot of most mortals here below.

They thought those happy hours, spent side by side, were but a foretaste of the lifelong companionship to come, in which they would go through life "hand to hand, heart to heart," cheering each other by kindly affection, lightening each other's troubles, if any cropped up, smoothing over the rough places they came to, going down the path that leads to the Valley of Death together, meeting the inevitable doom of the whole human race, if not at the same moment, at least without a long interval of separation, and sorrow.

Little they recked that those were their last, their very last, days of sunshine, of innocent enjoyment, of perfect faith, and trust, and that, when they met again, sorrow and shame would have scorched the freshness from the girl's fair cheek; quenched the light from her soft eyes, the joy from her young heart; that between them would yawn a chasm, dark, deep, bridgeless as the grave. They could not lift the curtain which obscures the future, fortunately for them, so they enjoyed to the full the happy present, blessed with youth, and health and love.

Meanwhile Mr. Spragg had arrived at Temple Dene, with the French cook, a wonderful fellow, who generally wore a queer, white flat cap, sported a ferocious moustache, a little imperial, and couldn't speak a word of English, accompanied by a small army of scullions.

He apologised profusely to Mrs. Marshall for introducing new material amongst the old, explaining that he feared to throw too much work on the shoulders of the aboriginals—an explanation which was graciously accepted by the *et d'ant* cook, who, magnificent in black satin in the housekeeper's own cosy sanctum, received her new master, and determined to

make the best of matters, and keep her promise to "Master Paul."

His dream seemed realised the first evening, as he sat in solitary state at the head of the table, with Benson behind his chair, and Fred in attendance, backed by Plague, Pestilence, and Famine, who brought in the dishes, which, however, were not medieval messes, but modern French concoctions, equally indigestible, and in some cases far from palatable. Still he took a small portion of each, feeling it was the right thing to do, and that, cost what it might afterwards, he must do the right thing before his servants, who would doubtless severely criticise his behaviour, and contrast it with that of their former master.

So he drank Chablis with his fish, hook with the entrées, port with the joint, claret at dessert, and finished up with a tiny glass of Chartreuse, simply and solely because Benson offered them to him, and not at all because he wanted or liked them. A flagon of foaming nut-brown ale would really have been more to his taste, with a nip of whisky to finish up with. Still, like a good many other foolish people in the world, he gave up comfort for discomfort, for fear of the adverse opinions of those about him.

The next morning the workpeople arrived from London, and he busied himself for a while giving directions to the foreman, and urging him to use the utmost despatch. Then he walked over the estate, round the Chase, visited the farm-buildings, his fishery in the Dene, and finally the stables, where Ferrars was occupied throwing down a fresh bed for Bluebell.

"How is the mare gettin' on?" he asked, wishing to ingratiate himself with all his people.

"Nicely, sir. A bit fresh. Ye see, Muster Paul 'e aint rode 'er this last week, and I'm gettin' a bit old for moun'tin' a 'oss."

"I suppose you are," agreed Mr. Spragg, looking at him reflectively. "You will want help in the stables, as I shall keep a good stud. You can choose your subordinates from among the village lads if you like, and I shall make you head-groom, and double your wages, if that will suit you?"

"Thankee, sir," responded Jem, somewhat overwhelmed at this liberality, tugging vigorously at his frosty locks, and scraping with his iron-shod boot, "that'll suit me fine, and I knows two or three lads at Dene that'll make smart grooms. May I make as bold as tee ast how many I am to 'ire?"

"As many as are necessary," replied his master, carelessly. "What did the wages of a stable-help more or less matter to him?"

"And now will you saddle the mare? I guess I'll go for a gallop."

"Kin—kin you ride well, sir?" ventured Jem, with an apologetic tug at the forelock, "cos she's mighty fresh."

"Oh, yes, I can ride well enough," replied the American, with a slight smile, and Jem was obliged to acknowledge that he could when he saw him mount and canter down the avenue firm as a rock, horse and man looking like one.

Mr. Spragg enjoyed his ride. The scenery was lovely, the newly-sown fields looking as if doctored with spun glass, as the stubble glistened and glistened in the steady sunshine. The ants were browning fast in the woods, the blackberries hung in great tempting clusters on the hedges, the hips and haws reddening, and the dense foliage turning russet and tawny yellow tints.

His quick eye noted everything—the mansions of his neighbours, the cottages of the villagers, the shops of Dene, the gable-ended houses with latticed windows, the post-office, which was also a general store, and many other things.

Amongst the other things he observed was a handsomely appointed baroness with a pair of greys, drawn up outside the store, in which was seated a queer-looking little old woman, very richly dressed, talking to a young girl

who stood leaning on the door, and whose face was so lovely that he turned back and rode by again to have another look at the deep azure eyes, veiled by ebony lashes, overarched by brows nearly as dark, at the amber hair, delicate complexion, and sweet, mobile features.

"Very pretty creature," he observed to himself. "Wonder who she is? Guess I shall know before long!" and, consoling himself with that reflection, he galloped home, and proceeded to dress for his solitary and stately dinner.

"Fine place," he soliloquised, when the servants had left the room, as he sat toying with a peach, "very fine, but too big for me alone. I shall be lonely by-and-by when the novelty has worn off, even though the county folk do receive me."

"It won't seem like home unless—unless I have a wife to cheer me. Yes, a wife; that is what I want. A charming, pretty woman, who will make herself agreeable to me and my friends, and who won't marry me altogether for what I can give her."

"I shouldn't like to be married altogether for my money. I should wish for a little love—only a little. Yet, shall I ever get it? I hardly think so. I'm not pleasant to look at, and with a somewhat dreary laugh, that made him more frightful, he gazed at his unhandsome reflection in a mirror opposite.

"No. If I were like young Chicherly I'd have a good chance; as it is—well, as it is, I calculate the woman won't run after me on account of my comely features," and, with a doleful shake of the head, he went to the smoking-room, and tried to drive away his dismal thoughts by a lavish indulgence in the soothing weed.

Washington C. Spragg was not long left in solitary grandeur. He was too big a fish to be neglected, and a few of the second-rate county people called on him; and one of the first-rate, and that was Mrs. Bevoir, who drove over behind the spanking greys, bringing her husband, a meek little man, and her Transatlantic friend, Mrs. Victoria Davidson, a dashing widow, with her.

Mrs. Davidson, who had every intention of replacing the dear departed Jonathan D. Davidson, if she got the chance, had artfully urged her to be first in the field, saying that it would be such a chance for Arabella, Clementina, and Henrietta (Mrs. Bevoir's three unmarried daughters) to make a brilliant match, and expatiating on the length of his rent-roll, and not giving the smallest hint of her own matrimonial designs upon the man with whom she had had a slight acquaintance in New York during the lifetime of her husband.

The châteline of Blacklands fell unexpectingly into the trap laid for her. She was eager, terribly eager, to marry her three fine, showy girls, and to marry them well, for, having no son, the property passed to a distant cousin, and the style in which they lived did not allow of much, if anything, being saved out of their income. The only chance for her children was a rich marriage, and sedulously she worked for that end.

Bella was engaged to Sir Humphrey Scargill, a neighbouring baronet, with a country seat and five thousand a-year, but Lina and Etta were still in the market, and as one was twenty-three and the other twenty-five it was time they went off; and if a title couldn't be got, why, then, a wealthy countess, or a fabulously wealthy tradesman—a sort of King Midas—must be taken. So she acted on Victoria Dashwood's suggestion, and paid a visit at Temple Dene.

Mr. Spragg met them with an easy manner that astonished the haughty aristocrat considerably—she having prepared herself for any amount of vulgarity and pomposity—and renewed his acquaintance with Mrs. Davidson cordially; in fact, so very much so that the heart in her plump bosom beat high to suffocation with hope that he might aspire to become possessed of her undeniable, but somewhat fall-blown, charms, and pay the

numerous bills she owed to many long-suffering tradesmen.

But the master of Temple Dene had no matrimonial thought in his mind as far as she was concerned. He was only grateful, sincerely and truly grateful, to her for bringing her friends—one of the best families in the shire—to call on him, thus opening the portals that would admit him to good society, those portals which otherwise must have remained closed to him; at any rate, for a long time. And it was in return for that kindness that he asked her to preside over the tea equipage when it was brought in, and stood beside her while the fat white fingers fluttered about among the Salopian cups, the veritable cups that Ruby had envied and admired a week or two before.

"Are you satisfied with this place?" ventured Mr. Bevoir, timidly.

"More than satisfied," replied Spragg. "It is every thin' I could wish it to be."

"Yes, I should think so," continued the henpecked little man; "but I noticed some workpeople, and thought you might be having some alterations made."

"Hardly alterations," the other hastened to explain. "Some repairs were needed, and a few modern-antique things required in some of the rooms, so I gave Jenron an order to do all that is necessary."

"You are in very safe hands there," said Mrs. Bevoir, with a gracious smile. "He has perfect taste."

"So I understand. I want things to remain as much as possible as they were under the Chicherlys. I think alterations and innovations are a mistake."

"Sometimes," she agreed. "Still, anything would be better than the way Fishlake Chicherly conducted affairs."

"Oh, indeed!" he remarked, not understanding the drift of her observation.

"Young Paul is a fine fellow," said her husband, not wishing a lot of scandal to be imported into the conversation.

"Very fine. A man it is impossible not to like."

"Quite impossible," chimed in the widow, turning her fine hazel eyes up to the ceiling for effect, "and it is equally impossible to help pitying him. 'The sins of the fathers,' and she shrugged her silk-clad shoulders significantly.

"A young man with a marred and ruined future," said the elder lady, decidedly, thinking how much she would have preferred him as a son-in-law to this man with his repulsive face. "We shall miss him very much, and the only good thing that comes from his compulsory departure is that it sends you into our midst as a neighbour," she added, with consummate tact.

"Thank you," replied the American, simply. "You are very kind."

"Not at all," she rejoined, "we shall hope to see a great deal of you, as probably you will be lonely here. There are always young people at Blacklands; come over whenever you feel inclined to do so, and you must promise to come to our wedding-bell. My eldest daughter's marriage with Sir Humphrey Scargill takes place on Thursday week. Your card of invitation is on its way, and I trust you will excuse the shortness of the invitation, but as we have only just had the pleasure of making your acquaintance we could not, of course, send it before."

"Of course not," he agreed, readily, "and I shall be most happy to accept it, and your kind general invitation. I have been feeling a little dull and lonely here. I suppose I am not used to the place yet. It may wear off after a time."

"It may. But what you want, Mr. Spragg, is a wife. There is nothing like a wife to drive away melancholy and give a man an interest in life."

"You are right," he responded, with an amount of energy that astonished and pleased both ladies, and only astonished Mr. Bevoir. "It is a wife that I want to brighten my life, and drive the shadows away."

"He means business," thought Mrs. Davidson, as they drove away. "My bills will be paid at last."

"Glad I called," muttered her hostess. "Lina and Etta will have a good chance. The tradesman means to marry."

And on the strength of this she gave them a *carte blanche* to go up to town and order from Madame White the most *recherche* ball dresses she could design, gave each a new suite of jewels, and let them perpetrate unheard-of extravagances in the shape of boots, gloves, and fans.

CHAPTER IX.

THE evening of the ball arrived at last, so long looked forward to by many fair ones; amongst others the Misses Vane—Ruby, because she hoped to make an impression on some one of her partners that might ultimately lead to something serious; and Opal, because Paul would be there, and they would be able to spend some precious hours together.

"How do I look?" demanded Ruby, as Paul who was to take them over to Blacklands, came in.

"Magnificent! Quite the Duchess," he replied, half jestingly, for he was astonished at her appearance.

The yellow muslin gown she wore was eminently becoming, the garnets flashing in her black tresses and round her polished throat and arms heightened the rich hue of her skin. She looked a handsome woman of two or three-and-twenty.

"Now you have seen the sun gaze on the moon," she cried; "and confess for once in a way Queen Luna surpasses King Sol," and stepping aside she disclosed Opal, who was sitting quietly on the rickety sofa, playing with the bouquet of forget-me-nots, and scarcely a fairer sight never met a lover's eyes. The bright hair was twisted round the little head like a crown, dotted here and there with tiny blue blossoms; the soft muslin robe left the white neck and arms bare, and had for its sole trimming the same flowers that graced her head. Her shapely feet and hands were cased in white kid, and a fluffy, snowy fan hung at her side.

"Shall I do, Paul?" she asked doubtfully, with none of the calm conceit which characterised her sister.

"Hark at her!" laughed the Duchess; "she is sure to be the 'Fairest of the Fair'; and she asks if she will 'do.'"

"Yes, you will do, dear," said her lover quietly, "your dress is extremely pretty."

"I am glad you like it. It was very kind of Aunt Dorothy to give them to us."

"Very kind. What sort of wraps have you?"

"Nothing very fine," replied Ruby with a *moue*. "Only a fur cloak and a woollen shawl."

"Are those enough?" he asked doubtfully.

"Oh! yes, quite. Opal shall have the cloak and I will take the shawl, and now we had better set off. It won't do to keep aunt waiting, and she is to meet us in the coffee-room, as she doesn't think, dear boy, that it would be quite respectable for us to appear chaperoned only by you."

"And it wouldn't," he declared stoutly.

"Very well, then, we'll go at once, for fear of being late." And she led the way to the ramshackle, one-horse fly, owned by the proprietors of the "Blue Dragon," followed by the others, after Paul had whispered "one kiss," and be given what he asked for; and away they went at a slow pace, which was highly displeasing to the Duchess, who was all anxiety to arrive, to see, and conquer.

Lady Dorothy was waiting for them in the dainty morning-room at Blacklands, where tea and coffee was being dispensed, magnificent in brocaded velvet and diamonds.

"Ah! my dears, glad to see you are punctual," she cried, as they appeared, leaning on Paul—Opal blushing, diffident, shy but very lovely; Ruby calm, cool, and self-possessed,

carrying herself in a way that showed plainly she knew she was good to look at. "Well, Lieutenant, I hope your charges have not been troublesome?"

"Not at all," he answered politely, bowing over the withered claw-like hand extended to him; "quite on the contrary. Their conduct has been most exemplary."

"Humph! that's a lover's verdict."

"And a true one," he rejoined promptly, a slight flush rising to his frank face.

"That remains to be seen."

"Yes. I formally hand them over to you now."

"Very well. I accept the charge, and I fancy they will prove more troublesome to me than they have to you."

"Probably," he acknowledged. "You will have to find them partners."

"Not much difficulty about that," she said, with a triumphant glance at her fair charges.

"The difficulty lies in that they will have too many."

"They will not object to that."

"Possibly not. Girls, do you mean to flirt?" she demanded abruptly.

"Oh! no, aunt," blushed Opal, looking at Chichester, as though there was no other man in the whole world for her.

"I daresay I shall if I get the chance," announced Ruby, coolly; "only I don't know much about the noble art."

"You need not distress yourself on that point," retorted Lady Dorothy, drily; "you are one of those who will soon learn. If any gay buck takes you in hand I warrant you'll prove an apt pupil, and know more about it in a short time than your instructor."

"Quite likely," she agreed, with the utmost calmness. "I have always prided myself on the rapidity with which I have learnt anything I took up, to the smallest detail, and I should be sorry to fail now."

"You would, you would!" crowed her antique relative, delightedly, in a thin treble, that resembled the efforts of a young cock to imitate his elders. "You'll do. No signs of failure about you. Before long you'll be a finished coquette, well-versed in all the wiles and tricks that win men's hearts—the sudden blush, the lowered lids, the melting glance, the quivering lips, the soft hand-pressure."

"No, aunt," she interrupted, "draw the line there, please; I shall leave the hand-squeezing for my admirers to do."

"Bravo! bravo!" laughed her ladyship, and Paul, and even Miss Vane, joined in the merriment, for Ruby's handsome face was full of disgust at the mere mention of her doing such a—what she considered—low thing.

"Come," she continued, as the strains of a waltz floated down to them, "dancing has commenced. We had better make a move," and she walked slowly off to the ball-room, leaning on Opal's arm, Paul with the Duchess bringing up the rear. Mrs. Bevoir was standing near the door receiving her guests, and a slight exclamation escaped her lips as her eyes fell on Opal—an exclamation which was echoed in a lower key by the woman at her side, Mrs. Davidson. Both women saw a dangerous rival had been imported into their midst. The dashing widow felt her full-blown charms would appear coarse and commonplace beside the glowing face of the young *debutante*, and the hostess intuitively knew that her girls would be eclipsed by the extreme beauty of Lady Dorothy's *protégée*, whom she did not recognise. True, she had seen Miss Vane at church, and occasionally passed her in the village with a supercilious nod, but then her face had been shaded by her hat, and her charms concealed by plain, even shabby, attire.

Now all the perfections of her face and figure shone forth undisguisedly, and were enhanced by the simple yet elegant dress she wore, showing that she might defy criticism, though she could not perhaps envy, hatred, and malice, and all their attendant evils.

"Who is this?" demanded the chatelaine

of Blacklands, forcing a smile, that was a ghastly travesty of mirth.

"My niece, Miss Vane," replied Lady Dorothy, with an introductory wave of the hand, a malicious twinkle in her keen eyes, for she noted the expression on her hostess's face.

"Is it possible! I should never have known her."

"I daresay not. Fine feathers make fine birds. This bird has mostly worn but a ruffled, tossed plumage, and that makes all the difference, you know."

"Of course. Delighted to see you, Miss Vane; and to you, Lady Dorothy, I owe my best thanks for bringing such a brilliant ornament to my rooms."

"Not at all, not at all; and here is another one," chuckled the old lady, presenting Ruby, who caused a second but lesser shock, for her good looks were of a more ordinary type.

"Very charming!" murmured Mrs. Bevoir, nearly fainting with rage to think that two such girls should have been introduced on the very evening that brought the millionaire, of whom she had such hopes, to her house.

"Lieutenant Chichester, extremely pleased that you have come. Let me introduce you to some partners," and forthwith she made him acquainted with Mrs. Davidson, who, liking the look of his fair, frank face, chained him to her side by entering into a brisk conversation with him; and offering him the tiny silver slipper, that did duty for a programme, hanging to her fan, obliged him to inscribe his name therein.

But he cast many glances towards Lady Dorothy and her charges, for the valise was over, and most of the men were crowding around her ladyship, and making most tender and unusual inquiries after her state of health.

(To be continued.)

"WHAT is he worth?" That is a question often asked. How much is he worth in shillings and pence? This is the way men estimate one another. The Lord has a different standard in estimating the worth of men. What is he worth to My Church? What is he worth to My cause in Christian example and service? What is he worth in doing good, and in labour to bless and save the world? How much better will the world be for his having lived in it? These are questions of serious import, and should be carefully and prayerfully considered. Seek to be rich towards God, and your worth to God and His cause cannot be estimated on earth.

UNCHARITABLE.—In speaking of other people's faults (says Addison) we cannot be guilty of a greater act of uncharitableness than to interpret the afflictions which befall our neighbours as punishments and judgments. An old maiden gentlewoman, whom I shall conceal under the name of Nemesis, is the greatest discoverer of judgments that I ever met with. She can tell you what sin it was that set such a man's house on fire, or blew down his barns. Talk to her of an unfortunate lady that lost her beauty by the small-pox, she fetches a deep sigh, and tells you that when she had a fine face she was always looking on it in her glass. Tell her of a piece of good fortune that has befallen one of her acquaintance, and she wishes it may prosper with her, but her mother used one of her nieces very barbarously. Her usual remarks turn upon people who had great estates, but never enjoyed them by reason of some flaw in their own or their father's behaviour. She has a crime for every misfortune than can befall any of her acquaintance; and when she hears of a robbery that has been made, or a murder that has been committed, enlarges more on the guilt of the suffering person than on that of the thief or the assassin. In short, she is so good a Christian that whatever happens to herself is a trial, and whatever happens to her neighbours a judgment.

IN THE GLOW OF THE MORNING.

In the golden glow of the morning,
How brightly our hopes unfold!
Our castles are crowned with turrets,
Our turrets o'erlaid with gold;
The rivers of peace are deeper,
The water more sweet and pure;
The pleasures they bring more lasting—
Life's promises far more sure.

In the golden glow of the morning,
Before the toil of the day,
Our hopes, like the birds, up-rising,
Are sweet as their roundelay.
It seems so easy to conquer,
Before our strength has been tried:
So easy abstaining from pleasure,
To those who are not denied.

But the path of the day leads upward,
With half its perils unsung;
The wings of our faith grow heavy
With the burden of doubt o'erhanging;
And, long e'er life's evening shadows,
The heart knows a twilight grey—
For the golden glow of the morning
For ever has passed away.

C. B. H.

GLADYS LEIGH.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROYAL, LORD CAREW, had found time hang very heavily on hand since Sir Hubert's funeral. In vain he told himself that Gladys Leigh was nothing to him—in vain he tried to fill his mind with other thoughts, and to forget his meeting with the lovely girl. Alas! like his uncle, Julian Brook, he was not good at forgetting, and wherever he went the sweet face, with its blue, grey eyes haunted him. He had given orders for the restoration and beautifying of the Priory, but he was very particular that none of the features of the place should be altered. It was to become again what it had once been. It was not to be modernised or improved. The people in whose hands Lord Carew placed the matter had known the Priory thirty years before. In the days of its glory they undertook that the restorer's hand should make no changes. They told the Viscount frankly it would be an expensive work, costing hundreds more than simply to modernise the old mansion; but Royal said simply he did not mind.

"I have plenty of money," he said to the head of the firm. "I hope it may be many years before I occupy the family seat, and I want the Priory as my home meanwhile. I grudge no expense; all I require is that the old place shall be restored to its ancient glory. I want nothing new—nothing modern. I should like the house to be so arranged that if one of the dead-and-gone baronets could come back to earth he would recognise it as his home."

"It is a strange fancy, Lord Carew."

"Is it? I am willing to pay handsomely for its gratification."

He settled all this before he went home to the old ancestral estate of Shire Abbey. Every order had been given before he ventured within reach of his father's suggestions and his mother's advice. Then, about a fortnight after Sir Hubert's death, he went home, graver and quieter than his wont—a strange line, as of some sudden pain about his mouth, and an air of general preoccupation which troubled both father and mother, and baffled all their efforts to discover its cause.

"Royal, I am certain something troubles you?"

He drew himself up a little wearily. He had returned from a long ramble earlier than he expected, and dropped into his mother's

boudoir for afternoon tea. The Duchess was still a very beautiful woman, and she loved Royal with all the fervour mothers often bestow upon eldest sons.

"You are over anxious, mother mine."

He strove to speak in his old light tone, but the effort was not successful. The Duchess went up to him and laid one hand upon his brow.

"Your head is burning, dear. Royal, don't trifle with me; do tell me what is wrong."

He looked at her with a strange, wistful expression in his dark eyes.

"Don't things go crookedly in this world, mother? Do you remember a year ago how impoverished my prospects seemed?—how my father had a difficulty in allowing me a quarter of the income the world would have deemed necessary to a Viscount?"

"I remember," said the Duchess, gently; "I suppose for our position your father and I are terrible paupers, but we have been very happy, Royal."

"Happy," repeated her son, with a strange, regret; "I think I would give half my whole life, mother, if those days could only come back again."

The Duchess would not answer; she only watched him with a grave, almost sorrowful face.

"We thought we must support our dignity, mother, and so I was engaged to an heiress; and now coal has been discovered on the estates you and my father bid fair to end your days as millionaires, while I am my uncle's heir, and have more money than I know what to do with."

"Barbara is a dear girl, Royal."

Royal sighed.

"She is a pretty, stylish creature," admitted her betrothed; "but I don't think she has any heart."

The Duchess started.

"Royal."

"My dear mother," he said, slowly, "it is not her fault; it may be a want in her anatomy. Lady Barbara is a charming partner for a dance, a brilliant companion to promenade with at a flower-show; but then life is not made up entirely of balls and flower-shows, more the pity."

"I don't understand you, Royal; do you mean you wish to break off your engagement?"

Royal shook his head.

"I am a Carew, mother; their word is their bond. Besides, apart from that, it is impossible for me to draw back even if I would."

"Not impossible, Royal."

"Yes, impossible, mother; when I proposed to Barbara I was a poor man—her fortune was far superior to mine. How can I look back now when, I suppose, I am the best match in England?"

The Duchess sighed.

"After all, when you are once married," she began, cheerfully, "things will improve; a quiet mutual liking, Royal, often produces more domestic happiness than a violent affection."

Royal smiled a trifle bitterly.

"Had you a quiet, mutual liking when you married, mother?"

The Duchess blushed, despite her forty odd years, as her children knew she had married at seventeen, after a month's engagement, the most ineligible of all her suitors. Several lives then stood between her husband and the dukedom; in fact, he was quite a detrimental when he ran away with the beauty of the season. Her eyes filled as she noticed the despondent expression of her boy's face.

"If you really think you cannot be happy with Lady Barbara," she began.

"We must fulfil our engagement," interrupted Lord Carew, "only, mother, spare me as much of the preliminaries as you can; make excuses for me if I do not seem a very devoted lover. Fortunately, Bab has too much sense to be romantic."

A strange fear struck the Duchess.

"Royal, is there anyone else?"

"Anyone else? What do you mean, mother?"

"When you were abroad so long with your uncle Julian did you meet anyone who drove Barbara from your heart?"

"I fear Barbara was never in my heart, mother; I believed in your doctrine of mutual esteem, etc., etc. I think when Uncle Julian told me the story of his life it taught me first there was such a thing as love, and most powerful it was."

"Yet his love brought him little happiness."

"Did you know her, mother?"

"Yes, she was the loveliest creature, with great, timid, gazelle-like eyes. Lady Violet had a wonderful charm about her. In spite of the way she treated Julian I never could bring myself to hate her."

"And yet you rejoice that her child should be deprived of her inheritance by your son."

"I have no care for any child of Hubert Leigh; he was a weak, cowardly man."

"The Priory is very beautiful."

"And your father tells me you are having it restored regardless of expense."

"I can afford it, mother."

"Of course you will make it your chief home when you are married. Barbara is delighted to think she will be within a drive of her own family. Royal, Lady Saville is vexed, I can see, at your delay. I think she would have liked the wedding to be this autumn."

"Such haste would not be seemly so soon after my uncle's death."

"But it is natural they should think the delay peculiar. I think it would be better, Royal, if you named some time—it would make things easier for yourself, and spare your father and me a great deal of annoyance."

"I will write to Barbara."

"There is no need—she will be here to-morrow."

"Now, mother, why did you do that?"

"I could not help it, Royal. I could see she wished to come, and under the circumstances—"

"It may be as well, and I am off to Fanshawe Castle next week."

He went himself with his mother to meet the Lady Barbara; he handed her into the barouche with affectionate care, he attended to her innumerable packages, showed her the few changes in the village as they passed through it, and altogether devoted himself to her amusement.

The Lady Barbara was some four-and-twenty years of age. She resembled a fashion plate, and was a dark, sparkling brunette. For years her parents had intended her to be Viscountess Carew, and she was intensely proud of her handsome, winning-mannered betrothed.

She knew that Royal was one of the most popular men about town, that even in his days of narrow means she had been considered lucky to be his choice, and now that to his other attractions he added vast wealth, my Lady Barbara really began to agree with society and think herself very fortunate.

They had known each other for years, and yet Bab had no idea of Royal's true character; a pleasant, amusing companion she would have styled him. That he had a deep, passionate nature, and was capable of the strongest intensest feeling she had not the least suspicion. She really thought that, like herself, he had no romance about him; she honestly believed the cool, courteous liking he showed for herself to be the strongest affection he was capable of.

She did not love him. I doubt if Lady Barbara could have loved anyone except herself, but she was proud of him, and she meant to be his wife.

The Duchess was a skilful manager; she contrived that the lovers should have a long tête-à-tête that very evening by sending them to look at the new rockery by moonlight.

The lovers! No one who did not know their engagement would have suspected it who saw

them walking through the shrubbery together.—Lady Bab with a white, transparent shawl coquettishly twisted round her head, Royal at her side, as far as bodily presence went, but speaking never a word, and with his dark eyes fixed on space.

And yet he was thinking of Barbara, thinking of his mother's adieu, and pondering what to say to his fiancée. Their marriage must be, he knew that. After all, what could he gain by delaying it? Yet he was strangely reluctant to fix the date of the ceremony which must make that wild passionate love which filled his breast a wickedness and a sin.

"I expected Lady Saville would accompany you, Barbara," he began at last. "I want to have a little serious conversation with her."

Barbara smiled sweetly. She had a remarkably pretty smile, only like the wax dolls of our childhood. She possessed but one, and used it so often as to wear out its charm.

"Mamma always likes what I like," she said, gravely, "so you may have the serious conversation with me."

After all he had better go through with it. Reluctant, distasteful as the task was to him, it was one of life's must-be's.

"We have been engaged now some time, Barbara," resumed Lord Carew, after the faintest perceptible hesitation.

"Yes," replied Lady Barbara, equably; "mamma was saying so the other day."

"And there is really no reason for delay," Royal dropped his stick in his embarrassment. "At least I see none."

Lady Barbara simpered.

"There will be a great deal to do," she said, quietly.

"Precisely; and I think all the preparations will get on better if we have fixed the date by which they will be required. What do you think of next Easter?"

Barbara would have preferred Christmas.

"We shall miss the season," she remarked, doubtfully.

"Easter falls early. We should have time to spend our honeymoon in Paris, and yet be back for you to be presented at one of the late Drawing Rooms. If you think Lord and Lady Saville have no objection, I should like to fix our wedding for Easter week."

"Very well," said Barbara, "that will give mamma plenty of time."

"Will you write to her? I am not great at letters, and —"

"I will write."

"There will be plenty of business to go through. We'll leave that to the lawyers. I have some idea of buying a small place in the country; I can well afford it. Do you prefer north or south?—inland or sea-coast, Bab?"

Lady Barbara stared.

"We don't want two country seats, Carew!" she said, decidedly. "With Arle Priory, what can we do with another estate?"

"I do not intend to reside at the Priory."

It was flat contradiction to what he had told the people who were restoring the Priory; but at this period of his life Royal often did contradict himself.

"Why not?"

"I have no particular reasons."

"I call it absurd! With a lovely place like that we might live there six months out of the twelve, and it is close to my family. Carew, we must make the Priory our chief house!"

Very quietly, yet very gently, came his answer.—

"Nothing will induce me to make Arle Priory our residence, Barbara! I beg you to understand on this point I am quite decided!"

"But why?"

"I repeat I have no particular reasons."

"Everyone will talk!"

"Let them."

"Papa and mamma will be terribly disappointed! I think it is most unfair to them!"

"Hardly," said Lord Carew, simply. "Since

when I asked them for your hand I had not the remotest idea I should ever be the master of the Priory."

She could not gainsay this; she was forced to yield the point, but only for the time being. Lady Bab was a determined character, and had quite made up her mind to have her own way.

She remained a week with the Duchess, and in that week Royal fulfilled all the duties of an attentive lover.

But it was a great relief to him when he watched the train out of sight which bore his ladylove on her return home. He had played his part well; only his mother had guessed how little heart was in his courtship—and then, only one day after Lady Barbara, he, too, went away to pay a long-promised visit to his friend Lord Fanshaw at Fanshaw Castle.

The two had been schoolfellows, and, later on, inseparable companions at Oxford. Then had come a crisis in Fanshaw's life. He had been engaged, and had to follow his darling to the grave on the day that should have heard her wedding bells—that was six years ago now.

Many people had never heard of the romance, others had forgotten it. The young lord had roved about a perfect wanderer ever since, never spending a month together at his own home; and so now, when he had been there six weeks, and yet showed no signs of leaving, not unnaturally folks began to wonder what could be his attraction.

"I am delighted to see you, Carew," was his greeting, as he wrung Royal's hand.

"And I to come! I don't think I have been at Fanshaw since I was a boy."

"You'll find nothing altered. It is a whim of mine to keep everything the same."

"And you yourself?"

Lord Fanshaw smiled, half sadly.

"I have come out of my shell, Carew! Would you actually believe it, I am going to let the dead past bury its dead. I have neglected my home too long, and now I am going to settle down as a country gentleman!"

"Alone!" asked Royal, meaningly.

"No, I am going to be married at Easter."

"So am I!"

"To Lady Barbara Ainslie?"

"Precisely—and you?"

Fanshaw smiled.

"Not to anyone so grand or imposing! I expect you'll be shocked at my darling's pedigree; her father was a drawing-master, and she is the vicar's governess."

"So that she makes you happy," said Royal, to his friend's intense surprise, "what else matters?"

"I think she will do that. I have told her all, and she is too noble to be jealous of the dead. She made but two stipulations, and they were strange ones!"

"What were they?"

"That we should not be married till Easter—that our engagement should be kept private, and that for three months of the time I should go away, and not even correspond with her! She seems possessed with the idea I shall change my mind, and thinks this plan will give me every opportunity for doing so. I have told the Carrs, and I stipulated to be allowed to tell you—not another creature knows."

"What is her name?"

"Lillian Adair."

"I am sure she is pretty."

"I don't know," said Fanshaw, simply.

"She is good; it's the sort of face, Carew, a man can look at day after day, and never tire of."

Of course Lord Carew was taken to the Vicarage and introduced to Miss Adair, and—which was not quite so much a matter of course—he was charmed with his friend's choice.

It seemed to him Lillian Adair was the fairest, gentlest woman he had ever met, and

that Fanshaw must needs be happy with her sweet companionship.

But the engagement threw Royal a good deal on his own resources, specially of an evening. He often strolled in the grounds with only his cigar for company, and so it came about that, wandering in the lane, the sound of a woman's sobs fell on his ear, and, looking in the direction whence they came, he recognised his life's love—Gladys.

He forgot all then—her grief, though it cut him to the heart to hear her sobs; his engagement, though a note from Lady Barbara was in his pocket. He could remember nothing except that he loved Gladys, and he had found her. Once more they two stood together.

He took her little ice-cold hand and chafed it tenderly in both his own; then, as she grew calmer, he begged her to tell him what was the matter.

"It is nothing," said Gladys, shivering even in the summer evening; "only I made a mistake."

That was just what Royal had done himself when he proposed to Lady Barbara; but he was not thinking of Lady Barbara now; he had thoughts and eyes for Gladys only now.

"Are you living with your aunt? Does she live near here, Miss Leigh?"

"My cousin," corrected Gladys. Somehow she had become very sensitive on this point since she knew more of the Pearsons. "Yes, I am living with her; it is quite close here; they call it the Gables."

"The Gables! You can't be related to the Pearsons?"

"I am."

"But—"

"I knew," said Gladys, faintly; "they are just what you think. They have plenty of money, and they don't mean to be unkind; only I am miserable. Cousin Sophia says I am a beggar; and, oh, Mr. Lorraine! and the girl clasped her hands, "it is quite true!"

"It is a cruel falsehood!" said Carew, warmly. "I should like to tell her so!"

"It is true," said Gladys, bitterly; "I have nothing in the world, you know."

He did not answer, only he raised the hand he still held and pressed it to his lips as reverentially as if she had been a queen.

"You must not stay there," he said at last; "it will only crush your youth and break your heart. You don't know how you are altered; you look like the little white ghost of the fair young hostess who welcomed me to the Priory only last July."

"Don't," said Gladys, with a sob in her voice, "don't speak to me of the Priory! I can't bear it!"

Every sob of hers cut him to the heart, just as the change in her face made his own grave and anxious. He loved as he had never thought it in his nature to love. He believed he could have taught her to love him back again; but, alas, alas! his wedding day was fixed—he was solemnly betrothed to another woman!

"I am your friend," he said, slowly. "Miss Leigh, I was the last person who saw your father alive. I would do my utmost to serve you if you will only trust me."

"I do," whispered Gladys, brokenly; "better than anyone else in the world."

"You must not stay with the Pearsons; tell them plainly their life is killing you by inches, and then leave the Gables."

"But where am I to go?"

That was the question. Alas! millionaire though he was, he could not offer this lonely child a home!

He dared not confide her to his mother's care since one look at her face would give the Duchess the key to the mystery of her son's unwillingness to wed the Lady Barbara.

"I once was charged to make you an offer," began Royal, slowly. "You refused then; do you think—"

She shook her head.

"Remember how I refused it; think of the contempt and scorn I flung into my answer!"

No, Mr. Lorraine, even if I were starving in the streets I could not go to your client for assistance now."

"It is but a few weeks ago," he urged. "I could not," she persisted. "I know it is not long, counting by days and weeks, since I was a girl at home, but life here has changed me; I feel quite old."

"You look a child," she sighed. "That is the worst of it," she said, hopelessly; "you see I am so young. Why, Mr. Lorraine, I might live fifty years."

"I hope you will," Gladys shook her head.

"I only want one thing—to die! I am so tired, Mr. Lorraine, and life is so hard! If I could only go to papa, and be at rest!"

"Many of us wish for rest, child," he answered, sadly, "but we have to live on."

"That is just it," she whispered; "I must live on; I can't lie down and die, just because I am unhappy. Mr. Lorraine, you promised once to be my friend. Will you find me something to do?"

"Something to do?" echoed Royal, in surprise; "a child like you?"

"I want to work," she answered; "many a girl younger than I am has earned her own living. Mr. Lorraine, at least then no one could call me a beggar."

They stood together in the moonlight, with only the stars for witnesses. Oh, how Gladys Royal would have told her of his love! But, alas, his lips were dead!

"You are so young!" he pleaded; "work would be so hard for you!"

"I had rather," said Gladys, simply, "I am not clever, not yet what is called accomplished, but I made papa quite comfortable, and I would do so too."

"You are quite sure you wish it?"

"Quite. Oh, Mr. Lorraine, do you really know of anyone who wants me?"

"No," he said, quickly; "but—Have you ever been to the Vicarage? Do you know Miss Adair?"

"I have seen her at church. No, I never go to the Vicarage."

"Well, you go there once, and ask for Miss Adair. She is older than you, but I know for the last five years she has done just what you speak of—she has earned her own living. Lillian Adair is a lady born and bred; she is a sweet, kind-hearted woman. I am sure her advice would be useful."

Gladys felt a strange sinking at her heart. "Is she a great friend of yours?"

"She is going to marry a great friend of mine."

"Oh!" and straightway the leaden weight seemed removed; "and do you think she will help me?"

"I am sure she will. Will you go and see her to-morrow, Miss Leigh?"

"Yes. Mr. Lorraine, how glad I am I met you! Are you staying at the Vicarage?"

"I am staying with Fanshaw."

Gladys decided a lawyer's position must be much higher than she had fancied. The girl's own pride of birth was little remembered now.

She stood lingering on at her friend's side, strangely reluctant to leave him, because his was the sweetest voice to her on earth.

"You must let me take you home, Miss Leigh."

"Oh, no! We might meet some of the Pearsons, and I could not bear you to see them."

He understood.

"We must meet again."

Gladys hesitated.

"You have called me your friend," he whispered; "surely you will let me know what you resolve upon?"

"Do you care?"

"I care too much, I fear," was the strange reply. "You say I must not call at the Gables. Will you meet me here to-morrow?"

A wistful smile crossed her lips.

"It sounds wrong,"

"It can't be wrong. We are friends, you know."

"I will come."

"At this time?"

"Yes."

He held her hand a few moments clasped tightly in his; then, with a muttered "Heaven bless you!" he was gone.

Gladys dreamed of him that night, poor child! Alas! all her grand notions had departed; she knew now that if Mr. Lorraine had been a lawyer's clerk instead of a fully-qualified solicitor the result would have been just the same.

"He will never know it," she thought to herself, as she brushed out her fair, soft hair. "When I get a situation we shall never meet again—no one will ever guess my secret. It is very foolish of me, only in all the world he is the only knight for me. He looks so brave and true, so strong and kind. It would be nice to have an arm like his to lean one through life's rough places."

Royal had a difficult task with Miss Adair, not that she was unwilling to help Gladys; far from it. She had noticed the girl's fair and face in church, and longed to see her in a more congenial home; but she told Lord Carew frankly she did not approve of his deception.

"No good ever comes of deceit," she said, gently. "Let me tell Miss Leigh your true name? If you object to the task I can explain it all to her."

Royal shook his head.

"You don't know how she would hate me," he answered. "The strongest feeling of her heart is her love for the Priory. She must never know that I, whom she has called her friend, am her despoiler. Indeed, Miss Adair, I cannot let you tell her."

"But what am I to do? I cannot speak of you by a false name."

"Need my name be mentioned? Oh, Miss Adair, if you had known Gladys six weeks ago, and could feel the awful change this time at the Gables has made in her face, you would long to help her!"

"I long to help her now."

"And you will have your scruples?"

"I must," she said, simply. "You are Lord Fanshaw's dearest friend, and I can't refuse your request; only, Lord Carew, if mischief comes of the deception you will hold me guiltless. Remember, I warned you of it."

He pressed her hand.

"I will remember."

Gladys Leigh was shown straight into the Vicarage drawing-room, where Lillian Adair sat waiting to receive her. A maid brought in afternoon tea, and the two girls grew intimate over it. Gladys was by nature frank and confiding; in an hour she had poured out her whole heart to Lillian.

"Don't tell me I must stay at the Gables," she pleaded. "I think it would kill me."

"I think you should leave at any cost. You would not like to be so near your cousins, as I know Mrs. Carr will be seeking a governess at Easter."

"I could not wait till Easter, and I don't know enough to teach any but very little children."

A little of her own abilities, a little of her wishes, followed then; she mentioned the name Lillian had been expecting to hear ever since her entrance.

"It was Mr. Lorraine suggested my coming to you. Do you know him very well?"

"I am very glad you came."

Mrs. Carr was called in to help at the consultation—a kind, motherly woman, who took Gladys to her heart at once, and charmed the girl by her gentle voice.

There was but one verdict—Gladys must leave the Gables. Mrs. Carr knew of nothing likely to suit her, but she promised to make inquiries among her friends, and also to advertise.

She told Miss Leigh a companionship would suit her better than anything else, and then

she bade the girl keep up her courage, and promised that she or Lillian would write to her as soon as they had any good news for her.

"What a sweet face!" said the elder lady, when they had watched Gladys walk slowly through the Vicarage gates; "but she is not fit to go amongst strangers. How did you hear of her troubles, Lillian?"

"Lord Carew told me."

"Lord Carew!"

Mrs. Carr seemed bewildered.

"Do you mean he knows her?"

"He had some business transactions with her father. She does not know his real name. I believe she thinks he is a lawyer."

"My dear, is he in love with her?"

"I hope not."

"Why? He seems a nice young man, and she has a face to take all hearts by storm."

"Dear Mrs. Carr, his wedding-day is fixed."

The Vicar's wife sighed.

"And is he staying long at the Castle?"

"I have no idea."

"Then, Lillian, the sooner we get Miss Leigh away the better. I had meant to be very careful about an engagement, and to wait a few months rather than take anything not just what she wanted; but if things are so we had better accept the first suitable offer."

"I think so, too," confessed Lillian. "If he sees her often he must love her, and then—"

Three times that first meeting in the moonlight were repeated, three times Gladys and Royal met again. There was nothing said between them the whole world might not have heard. It was as friends they paced the shabby path, as friends they talked of the Priory and Sir Hubert's death, as friends they discussed Lillian Adair's prospects; but Royal never summoned courage to tell Gladys of his *fiancée*, never broke to her that he was the Priory's lord.

The deception once begun he found explanation well-nigh impossible, and there was this strangeness about their talk—they never mentioned the future, they never alluded to "Mr. Lorraine's" circumstances, friends, or prospects.

Gladys knew as little about him as when she parted from him at Arle, only, alas! she thought of him now no longer as a stranger. She had learned to listen for his step, to hunger for the very sound of his voice.

And now it was the fourth time they had met in Lord Fanshaw's grounds. Gladys looked less troubled than when Royal first found her there; a faint colour had come back to her cheeks. A sparkle of hope shone in her dark eyes, the world seemed fairer to her now than in the days when she first came to the Gables.

Never a word of love had Royal said to her, never an effort had he made to win her heart, and yet an inward something told her she was dear to him, and if she had not known her own secret she would have learned it by the pang these words gave her.

"I must say good-bye to you to-night. I am going away."

"Going away!"

"I have been here a month," he began, absently—"a month, though it seems like a day, and I must go home."

A long, long silence. She could not trust herself to speak.

"Gladys," said Royal, with feverish eagerness, "can you guess why I am going, child? You have grown all too dear to me! I dare not remain within sight of your sweet face."

"I had meant to go away and say nothing," he went on, after a pause, "but I cannot. I must tell you this once all you are to me. Gladys, my love, my darling, I have cared for you from the first moment I saw your face! Child, a life can hold but one love, and you are mine."

"I left Arle with a bitter heartache, for I had left the one love of my life behind. I ought to have gone away when I found you



["WHAT A SWEET FACE!" SAID THE ELDER LADY, WHEN THEY WATCHED GLADYS WALK SLOWLY THROUGH THE VICARAGE GATES.]

here, but you were in sorrow. I thought I might do what a friend could to ease your burden. I persuaded myself I could keep my secret locked in my own breast, and so I stayed on. I tried to forget the barrier between us, I tried to teach my love to be but a friend's. I failed—failed miserably. A letter from my mother has reminded me of my duty, and so, Gladys, I am here to-night to say good-bye."

She could not speak. Once, twice she tried, but her trembling lips would not obey her wishes.

"You are not angry with me for speaking?" pleaded Royal. "Sweetheart, you can't be injured because I have loved you above all save honour? My life will miss its crowning joy, but while I live I shall cherish your memory in my heart. Gladys, I want you just to say 'Heaven bless you' before we part."

"Must we part?" whispered the girl. "Mr. Lorraine, need your love be all in vain?"

A strange joy thrilled through him, succeeded by a passionate remorse.

"Don't!" he breathed, hoarsely. "Oh, Gladys, don't let me think I have spoilt your life, too!"

"You have not spoilt it," she whispered; "you have only taught me what love is."

"Gladys," cried the strong man, huskily, "why should we both be sacrificed to a scruple? Why should our happiness be wrecked because months ago—before I saw you—I had made a great mistake."

"I don't understand," she said, faintly. "You speak as if our love were wrong."

"It is not wrong," he cried, as though arguing against some unseen enemy. "My love for you is the purest, strongest passion of my heart, Gladys. I will tell you all, and you shall decide."

Her hand stole silently into his. The very action showed how perfectly she trusted him.

"Gladys, my name is not Lorraine." She started. "I was in his office the day when he

was discussing his journey to Arle. It was very inconvenient for him to leave London, and he sent me in his stead with full powers to act for him. It was a deception, dear, but it began harmlessly. I thought to you and Sir Hubert I could be but the passing acquaintance of a day. I judged it did not matter by what name you called me. It has led me into a bitter grief. But yet I never meant a wrong in the first case."

"It was not a wrong," said his darling's voice.

"Before I ever saw you, Gladys, when my father was in great pecuniary embarrassments, I became engaged to an heiress. She did not love me. I had only a friendly liking for her. Neither of us were romantic. The parents on each side urged on the match, and we were engaged. Almost directly afterwards I went abroad."

"Go on," she whispered.

"I came back only a few days before I met you with my whole future changed. By a relation's death I became a millionaire, and my father by a sudden freak of fortune was raised from poverty to wealth. But the months of absence had done their work, Gladys. I had awoke to the miserable nature of my engagement before I ever saw you, darling. I consulted my father as to my power of breaking off the match."

"And he refused his consent?"

"He asked me if I had learned to care for another. I told him no. Then he told me duty bound me to my *fiancée*, that having proposed to her a poor man it would be dishonourable to draw back now. The whole world, he said, would say my feelings had changed with my fortune."

"Does she love you?"

"She does not know what love is, Gladys. I let my father persuade me then because I cared but little for my freedom, because I did not think I should ever feel what people call true love. But, Gladys, the whole case is

changed. I love you, sweetheart, with every fibre of my nature. Without you my whole future is blighted. Darling, why should our lives be sacrificed to a mere scruple? Why must our love be set aside because of a formal promise?"

Gladys looked into his face with her sweet blue eyes.

"I love you," she whispered, "I love you just as you do me; but we must part."

"We will not part," he interrupted her. "You have confessed you love me. If so, why condemn me to a life of misery, Gladys? I assure you *she* will feel no heartache. She has not your clinging, sensitive nature. You shall never repent your decision, darling. You shall have a life as perfect as love can make it if only you will let me break this bare skeleton of an engagement, and claim you before the world as my own."

And then, with his arms around her, heart beating against heart, he waited for her answer.

(To be continued.)

"WHAT I should like to be sure of," writes George Eliot in one of her letters, "as a result of higher education for women—a result that will come to pass over my grave—is their recognition of the great amount of social unproductive labour which needs to be done by women, and which is now either not done at all or done wretchedly. No good can come to women, more than to any class of male mortals, while each aim at doing the highest kind of work, which ought rather to be held in sanctity as what only the few can do well. I believe, and I want it to be well shown, that a more thorough education will tend to do away with the odious vulgarity of our notions about functions and employment, and to propagate the true gospel that the deepest disgrace is to insist on doing work for which we are unfit, to do work of any sort badly."



[BEE LOOKED UP. A YOUNG MAN WAS STANDING AT HER SIDE, WITH HALF-OPENED UMBRELLA.]

NOVELLETTE.

REGINALD'S FATE.

CHAPTER I.

His name was Reginald, but his friends and intimates never called him anything but Rex; perhaps they thought this kingly title suited to him—perhaps they really believed he was powerful as a sovereign, for this much was certain, if ever man seemed born for prosperity and to go through life without a care, that man was Reginald Fairfax.

Everything succeeded with him. Left an orphan at five years old, he was adopted by a wealthy uncle; he grew up at Fairfax Castle its heir presumptive—he won honours at college, and troops of friends, finally entered the army, became the darling of his regiment, and as it was quartered at Aldershot, continued never to miss anything worth seeing of the London season. Wherever he went he was a favourite. Blue-eyed, handsome, and intelligent, at twenty-nine Captain Fairfax might have had his choice of Belgravia's beauties, and, what was more to the purpose, the parents of any beauty he selected would have greeted his alliance with acclamation; for was he not the heir of his uncle, Sir Isaac, and whenever that elderly gentleman departed this life would not his handsome nephew come in for the baronetcy, for Fairfax Castle, a house in town, family jewels, and twenty thousand a year?

"The estate is not entailed," whispered Mrs. Burns to her friend Lady Carteret. "Sir Isaac would cut off his nephew with a shilling if Rex did anything to displease him."

Lady Carteret smiled blandly; she was thinking a match with her daughter could not possibly be displeasing to the baronet. She replied, with quiet dignity,—

"Captain Fairfax is not in the least likely to offend Sir Isaac; besides, everyone knows the old gentleman is devoted to him."

"Not so very old," said Mrs. Burns, spitefully. "Sir Isaac is barely sixty; he might marry again any day."

"Nonsense!" returned my lady, curtly. "Hush! here he comes. I declare he is the handsomest man in the room!"

He certainly was. A tall, soldierly figure, hair of dark curling brown, the clear cut classic features, which were almost an inheritance in his family, and a pair of dark, expressive, blue eyes; evening dress was singularly becoming to Rex—just now he looked his best.

A young girl was on his arm, a girl with bright, sparkling, black eyes and masses of raven hair, a rosy colour, and easy grace. She was Lady Carteret's only child, and that matron was very pleased, indeed, to observe the good understanding evidently existing between her and the young officer.

"You look flushed, Helen," she said, with maternal anxiety. "You should not dance too much."

"You could not expect her to sit still," said Rex, with a smile. "Lady Helen is the best waltzer in the room."

The music struck up again, he bent over her and asked if she were rested. She assented, and took his arm. The Countess looked up.

"You will take care of her, Captain Fairfax? Remember, she is not very strong!"

"I ask nothing better than to take care of her for ever!" said Rex, in a tone so low that no one but Lady Carteret heard the words.

She leant back with a sigh of relief as she caught them; she knew then the prize she had hankered for was hers—that the proposal had been made and answered—her portionless daughter was engaged to the best match of the season.

Lady Carteret was not a designing woman, but fate had been very cruel to her. Married to a nobleman of fair estate and good fortune, she had never expected to be left a widow with eight hundred a year, the very modest settle-

ment made before her marriage; but, alas! the Carteret estates were strictly entailed! No son was born to her, so when her husband died she had meekly to give up her grand establishment and sink into retirement.

All her hopes were centred in Helen. Her daughter must make a grand match, and recover the riches she longed for.

This was Lady Helen's second season, however, and as yet no suitor had come forward whom her mother regarded as eligible. Captain Fairfax satisfied her utmost ambition.

She had an old acquaintance with Sir Isaac, and felt certain he would welcome her child as his niece. The world looked very fair to the Countess-Dowager on that June evening. She sat up till three in the morning without finching, and when Rex at last led Lady Helen to the carriage, her mother was as wide awake as herself, instead of dozing wearily in one corner, as was her favourite custom.

"Shall you be at home to-morrow, Lady Carteret?" asked Rex, as he took hold of the dowager's hand.

"To-day you mean," said Helen, lightly; "It is past four!"

"Come to lunch," said her mother, pressing the young man's hand almost affectionately; "we shall be delighted to see you."

The carriage drove off, there was a pause, and then Lady Carteret said, inquiringly,—

"Well."

"It is all right," said Helen, quite gaily. "Mamma, what is Fairfax Castle like? I suppose we shall have to live there?"

"It is charming!"

"I hope so. Captain Fairfax seems infatuated with it!"

"You are a lucky girl, Helen!"

"Mamma, that's not polite of you. It would sound so much nicer if you said Captain Fairfax is a lucky man!"

"You know I mean that too. He will be an excellent husband, I am sure."

Helen smiled brightly. "We need not have been so anxious last season," she said, carelessly. "You see I have done much better for myself by waiting!"

"And you like Captain Fairfax, my love?"

"I agree with you that he is charming!"

"And he will have twenty thousand a year?"

"Yes. Oh! the relief of not having to scheme and calculate our expense! Mother, I think it is much easier for rich people to be good!"

"Helen!"

"I mean it, mamma! If I hadn't had to pinch and scrape and think about money matters all my life, I should be able to forget Captain Fairfax is rich, and think only of himself; now, handsome and charming as he is, I can't help remembering he has twenty thousand a year—or will have, perhaps, some day."

Mother and daughter rose late after their excitement; Helen came into her mother's dressing-room about twelve. She was clad from head to foot in a loose clinging muslin wrapper; there was a pink silk girdle round her waist, and she wore knobs of the same coloured ribbon at her throat; her soft hair was coiled low on her neck, the front one short, curled over her forehead. She was very pretty; the simple white dress suited her, and at twenty-two Helen Devonish was young enough to dispense with any aids of art to deck her beauty; even in the fresh morning's light she was quite as attractive as she had been the night before.

"How do I look, mamma?"

"Beautiful. That dress suits you perfectly."

"Mamma," said Helen, dubiously, "what are we to do about my trousseau? You know Madame Louise says she won't take another order until her account is settled. Horrid woman!"

The Countess had pinched and scraped all through her daughter's childhood, so as to be able to launch out when Helen was presented. But alas! even her carefully accumulated savings could not stand the expenses of two London seasons. She was getting hopelessly into debt, and literally knew not where to turn for a penny of ready money.

"Don't think about that," she said, piously.

"Ways and means will be found."

That was a set speech with Lady Carteret. She was fond of saying, when anything was particularly desired, and could not be had, that "it would be found." She half closed her eyes and looked upwards very sanctimoniously always when she uttered her favourite formula, so that strangers sometimes fancied she expected the desired article to fall from heaven.

"I hope they will," said Helen, a little tartly. "Rex wants us to be married in August, so there is not much time."

"August! I can never manage it by then."

"It would be more expensive to keep me on your hands, I think, mamma."

A loud knock at the door—a message. Captain Fairfax was in the drawing-room. The Countess looked at her daughter.

"You had better leave me alone with him for ten minutes, I think."

"Twenty if you like it better," said Helen, nonchalantly, and then she threw herself on a couch, while the Countess went to greet her future son-in-law.

"Helen has told you of my wishes?" said Rex, with that winning way which almost gained him golden opinions. "Dear Lady Carteret, will you trust your daughter to me? I will cherish her as my own life."

"I am sure of it," said the Countess, enthusiastically. "Captain Fairfax, I can sanction your engagement with every confidence."

"And you will use your influence with Helen to consent to a speedy wedding? I hate long engagements, Lady Carteret. They are a great mistake."

"But, remember, there is a great deal to be

thought of," said the widow, pleasantly; "and Sir Isaac must be consulted."

"My uncle will be delighted to welcome Helen. He has often expressed a wish that I should marry."

"But he may not approve of your selecting a portionless bride for all that."

"Sir Isaac is not so mercenary as you would infer. For years he has not lived up to his income, and I am certain he will enable me to make an ample settlement upon Helen. He has always promised to allow me five thousand a year whenever I married, and at his death—though I trust that is far distant—his whole property will descend to me."

"I was at the Castle once," said the Countess, "a good many years ago. I remember your uncle perfectly. What a strange thing he never married!"

Rex laughed.

"A good thing for me," he said, lightly.

"I fear my prospects would not be very brilliant if he had."

Helen decided the ten minutes stipulated for had expired, and came in. Lady Carteret discreetly withdrew, and Rex going up to his fiancée took her hand in his.

"All is going smoothly with us, Helen," he whispered. "Your mother makes no difficulties to our happiness, my darling. Surely we shall soon be each other's for all time."

He had drawn her very close. One hand was toyed with the curls on her forehead. He looked into her face very fondly. Rex Fairfax was not a man to give away his heart lightly, and this dark-eyed damsel was his first love.

"There is your uncle," suggested Helen.

"Mamma seems to think he may object."

Reginald's thoughts flew back to an evening, not a week ago, when he was at Fairfax Castle, and had openly told Sir Isaac of his hopes.

"I don't like Lady Carteret," had said the Baronet, simply; "she is not a good woman, Rex."

"Helen is not in the least like her mother, uncle; she is the sweetest, most artless creature."

"And has read up your value as heir of Fairfax. Aye, Rex, you are no mean match for a portionless girl!"

"Lady Helen is an earl's daughter."

"And penniless! I wish your thoughts had gone elsewhere, Rex, my boy; I do, indeed."

"I have never seen any woman I should care to marry but Helen Devonish."

"You have not seen all the women in the world, Rex."

"But do you mean, sir, you would refuse your consent to my marriage with Lady Helen?"

Old Sir Isaac answered, promptly,—

"Certainly not. I am quite ready to receive her as my niece. You will have my best wishes for your happiness if she marries you."

For once Rex was disconcerted.

"I don't understand you, sir. One moment you seem to infer Lady Helen is mercenary for accepting me; the next you hint she will refuse me."

"Time will show, lad."

"But I am sure of your consent?"

"Certain. You have been as a son to me for years, Rex, and I have no wish to cross your inclinations."

Nothing could be plainer language than this, so the Captain considered himself free to tell the Countess his uncle would welcome Helen as a niece, and approve his engagement.

In his heart of hearts Rex disliked Lady Carteret quite as much as his uncle did, and was quite resolved not to see much of her after his marriage. He deemed Helen innocent of her mother's faults. He loved her, and proposed to her of his own free will; but that did not blind him to the fact that from the moment of his introduction to the Countess she had marked him as her prey. So when Helen hinted his uncle might object Captain Fairfax soothed her fears.

"He has wished me to marry for years. I am quite sure he will love you dearly."

"Shall you tell him at once, Rex?"

"Certainly. You know, Helen, I want our wedding to be in August—barely two months hence."

"Why are you in such a hurry?"

"I want my wife."

"You have done very well without her hitherto, it seems to me."

"But I don't mean to do without her much longer now, Helen. Be a good girl, and fix a day in the first week of August for our wedding."

"But the trousseau!"

"I don't see what you want with a trousseau," he returned, impetuously. "Surely you have a white dress that you can be married in? The one you have on would do very well; it is very pretty."

Helen smiled. Ah, if she could only follow his suggestion, and have no trousseau, what an awful perplexity it would save her! What calculations! What eating humble pie to impatient tradespeople might he avoided if she dared to set the world's customs at defiance, and become a wife without a trousseau.

A tall man-servant came in and announced lunch. Lady Helen and her lover followed him to the dining-room, and a very pleasant, sensible little meal followed. The Countess always lived well. She used to say that no one but rich people could afford to betray their practised economy. The repast was simple, but perfect of its kind. It was almost ended when the tall man-servant approached Captain Fairfax with a solemn air.

"A person has just brought this, sir. It was thought to be of consequence, and so has been sent on from Aldershot."

He handed Rex a telegram. Somehow those yellow envelopes seem always to carry with them a burden of fear. Strong man as he was Rex started. Helen gave a little scream, and the Countess said, sweetly,—

"Pray read your message, Captain Fairfax. I hope and trust it brings no ill-news."

"Do read it," urged Helen. "You look quite troubled."

Thus adjured Rex tore open the envelope; the message it enclosed was very short.

"Come at once. Sir Isaac is dying." The sender was Martha Gibson, his uncle's house-keeper.

"Come at once. Sir Isaac is dying," Rex read the words over again and again before he seemed to realise their meaning, then he turned to Lady Carteret.

"I must go to Fairfax at once; my uncle is very ill."

Then ensued a hurried bustle of sympathy, condolences, and surprise. Rex, who knew the train service to Fairfax almost by heart, saw at once, with a little haste, he could catch the five o'clock express from King's Cross, even if he spared a few minutes to telegraph to his servant to follow him with some clothes. He had hardly time for more than farewell to Helen, though the Countess left them alone graciously that they might enjoy a *little à tête*. He only took her in his arms, and pressed her to his heart.

"I shall not be away long—you will think of me often, sweetheart?"

"Every day. Rex, is Sir Isaac very ill?"

"I fear so."

"Then you may come back, Sir Reginald—"

She stopped herself abruptly. The expression which crossed his face told her she had made a mistake, and she went on, hurriedly, "But you may find him better?"

"I hope so. Will you write to me, Helen?"

She promised. Rex took his last kiss from her lips, and sprang into the cab which had been sent for. Lady Helen stood at the window till it was out of sight.

"I wish the telegram had not come," she said to her mother; "it seems an ill-omen."

"Nonsense! I am glad it did not come yesterday. Now Captain Fairfax is your promised husband, and his absence does not matter."

"It makes me shiver," said Helen, fretfully.

"Bad news following so close upon an engagement must be an ill-omen."

"I don't believe in omens," said the Countess, quietly, "and I don't call this bad news."

Helen started.

"Instead of being the wife of plain Captain Fairfax for a dozen years or so you will begin your life as a baronet's bride. If Sir Isaac is obliging enough to die before the wedding I shall be uncommonly grateful to him."

"Mother!"

"It will be to your advantage, child. He may consent to the match, to please Rex, but he won't like it."

"You never said so before."

"No."

"You can't be sure of it."

"Listen Helen. Years ago, before ever you were born, I offended Sir Isaac. He was plain Mr. Fairfax then, but I don't suppose he has forgotten it."

"What did you do?"

"I refused to marry him."

Helen started. There seemed nothing but surprises before her, but she loved her mother after her fashion and was loyal to her.

"I don't see why he should be offended at that. You had a perfect right to refuse if you liked!"

"You don't understand," said the Countess, coolly. "We were engaged, but after that I met your father; he was Earl of Carteret and had ten thousand a-year. Isaac Fairfax was a younger son with a scanty portion."

"And you jilted him?"

"I did."

"Oh, mother!"

"Any woman of sense would have done the same, but Helen, in my case it didn't answer. Your father never trusted me; he was always throwing my falsehood in my teeth, and within a year of my wedding Isaac came into the family estates and title."

"How sorry you must have been?" said her daughter, naively.

"Sorry! I should think so, especially as the time went on and I had no child. If I had had a boy my position would have been assured, but I was childless until I had been married four years, and then you came into the world, Helen. You owe me a great deal for the disappointment of that time."

"And you have never seen Sir Isaac since?"

"Never."

"He has not married?"

"No. For two years after our rupture he wandered over Europe. Not even the news of his inheritance brought him home. At last, when his younger brother died, he came back to England to make a home for his orphan nephew. He has lived at Fairfax Castle ever since, and the world regards him as a cold, austere man, with no feeling for any human creature except Reginald."

"It is a strange story."

"From the moment your father died I had but one scheme, one ambition, that you should marry Reginald Fairfax. I have slaved and toiled to gain this end. To-day my efforts are crowned with success, and like a foolish child you begin to talk of ill-omens. Put such thoughts out of your head; think of the time when you will be the mistress of Fairfax Castle, and this miserable struggle for existence, this hand-to-hand fight with genteel poverty, is over. I have worked hard, Helen; I have schemed perpetually to gain this triumph for you, but my task is achieved now, and I am content."

"Do you suppose Rex knows, mother?"

"What?"

"About you and his uncle."

"I should think not; men are funlike women, and not given to tell the story of their disappointments. If Sir Isaac recovers, and you live with him at Fairfax, you must never betray what I have told you."

"I'd rather he wouldn't recover, mother," said the girl, slowly; "it seems to me he must be as your child."

"I don't see why; it seems to me just a mere fate that has thrown you and Rex together. Depend upon it, Helen, that is it; you are Reginald's destiny, just as I was Sir Isaac's."

Meanwhile Captain Fairfax had reached London and caught the five o'clock express. He was now speeding northwards as fast as steam could take him. Very mingled were his feelings—joy for the promise of Helen's love, sorrow for the danger of the only father he had ever known. Sir Isaac had been an indulgent guardian; he had never crossed his nephew's way in anything, and the two loved each other warmly.

Not a single fear for his own future troubled Rex—he was too much used to prosperity to become anxious; besides, he was so sure of his uncle's affection that he felt himself as truly the heir of Fairfax as though he had been born Sir Isaac's son, with title and estates strictly entailed upon him. There was no pondering over his future to distract his thoughts from his uncle's danger and Helen's love. Rex felt he never should forgive himself if he were too late, if he could never hear that kindly voice or press that fatherly hand again. He was in time.

He read that much in the face of the groom who stood waiting with Sir Isaac's dog-cart, to which was harnessed the fleetest horse in the Castle stables. The man touched his hat respectfully, and declared his master was still alive.

"But there's no hope, sir; he's sinking fast."

"What was it?" in an awe-struck tone, as he sprang to his seat and they dashed off.

"A fall from his horse, sir. Sir Isaac was brought home last night; we telegraphed to you at once."

"Is he conscious?"

"Yes, sir; and he does nothing but ask for you. Mrs. Gibson says it's piteous to hear him."

Rex rushed up the grand staircase at the top of his speed; then he subdued his haste and involuntarily heaved his breath as he turned the handle of his uncle's door and went into the invalid's presence.

Dying! ah, not a doubt of it. Little as he knew of illness Rex felt that as he gazed on the pale, drawn features; then he flung himself on his knees by the bed, and taking his uncle's hand kissed it tenderly as a woman.

Nurse and doctor understood that the presence so longed for was come; they went slowly out and left the uncle and nephew alone—the one so full of life and strength, the other on the very threshold of the grave.

"Rex."

"My dear uncle!"

"It's all over, my boy; I'm going home. I shall see your parents there, Rex."

The Captain's eyes were full of tears.

"But there's something else, lad"—his failing breath made his voice so faint Rex could hardly catch his words—"I wanted you to be happy; I did, indeed, Rex."

"I am sure of it," said Reginald, heartily. "You have been the best and kindest friend orphan ever had. Uncle, from the day I came here you have made my life one long happiness."

A smile rested on the old man's face.

"I loved you, lad, dearly, and I wanted to save you. You'll remember that it was from no ill-will, only just that you should be safe, not as I was tricked and deceived."

His voice failed. Rex bent over him.

"I will remember."

"And you'll bear no malice—I'd not rest easy in my grave, lad, if I thought you did."

"I shall never think of you with anything but gratitude, uncle—never!"

"And you'll be good to her—my little girl, who never knew her father."

Bewildered almost beyond expression, Rex could only ascribe these words to the wanderings of delirium. He bowed his head in token of assent, and happy in that unspoken promise, Sir Isaac's lips parted in a smile.

He sank back upon his pillow quite dead. He had only lived half-an-hour after his nephew's coming.

As once in a dream Reginald went to bed, but no sleep awaited him—that passionate pleading rang in his ears. Forgive! What was it he had promised to forgive? From whom had his uncle meant to save him?—and who—oh! who was the little girl for whom his kindness had been promised—the little girl who had never known her father.

It was ten o'clock the next day—Rex sat trifling with a late breakfast—when the servant told him Mr. Ashwin had arrived. The name recalled Rex to the fact that many business arrangements had to be made. Mr. Ashwin had been solicitor to the Fairfax family for nearly thirty years. Surely he might suggest a clue to those dying words which rang so painfully in Sir Reginald's ears? The two gentlemen shook hands.

"I am an early intruder, Sir Reginald," said the man of law, gravely, "but I promised your uncle to place this letter in your hands as soon as possible after his death, and I have a great deal to discuss with you at your convenience."

The letter was very short. It covered only one side of a sheet of paper.

"MY MUCH-LOVED BOY,—I always meant to leave you my estate and its revenues. The large savings which have accumulated since I came in for the title seemed to me an ample provision for other claims. But you tell me you love Lady Helen Devenish. Her mother is a fiend in human shape. She spoils my life. If I can help it her child shall not wreck yours. I have thought long and anxiously about my will, and have now made one which will save your being the victim of a heartless coquette. If as things now are Lady Helen accepts you she will do so for love's sake only—if she refuses you will at least be spared becoming the prey of an adventuress. You have no extravagant habits or expensive tastes. I have left you enough for a simple home life. I never loved you more, Rex, than now, when I seem to be despoiling you of what you have regarded as your birthright."

In utter amazement Rex turned to Mr. Ashwin.

"What does it all mean? Am I disinherited?"

"I have the will here if you will allow me—"

But Rex interrupted him.

"No, no. I can't listen to a rigmorale. Just tell me the facts plainly."

"Sir Isaac has decreed that all your debts should be paid out of his estate."

"I haven't got any."

"And that you should enjoy the house known as Marshlands for the term of your natural life, and an income of eight hundred a-year to keep it up with."

Rex started.

"But this place, the town house, the Fairfax revenues and all his funded property, what on earth has my uncle done with these?"

"He has left all the funded property to a young lady. This estate and its revenues as well as the town house come to you on one condition."

"And that is?"

"That you marry the same young lady."

"It's absurd. I am an engaged man," he paused; then added, "besides, I never heard my uncle speak of any young lady. Who is she?"

"Sir Isaac's only child."

Rex nearly tumbled off his chair in amazement.

"Sir Isaac was never married."

"Pardon me. Seven-and-twenty years ago he was jilted by Miss Helen Derry, now the Dowager Lady Carteret; in desperation he married a beautiful actress."

"Married her!"

"Certainly, Sir Reginald; the certificate has been in my hands for years."

"But why did he keep it secret?"

"It was a singularly unhappy marriage. Lady Fairfax adored her husband, and was wretched when she discovered he had married her out of pique. She claimed the only redress he could offer her—her freedom. She took her child with her; being a girl she said bitterly the infant had no value in the father's eyes. Lady Fairfax and her babe remained in America when Sir Isaac came home, and settled at the Castle."

"And surely he heard from her?"

"Never but once. In that letter she rejected all offers of pecuniary assistance. She could earn enough, she said, to support herself and child."

"Then she may be alive now?"

"It is probable."

"And the girl may be married?"

"No. It was the one condition stipulated by Sir Isaac that his daughter should never enter into any matrimonial engagement without his knowledge and sanction. He has never been asked for the latter, so Miss Fairfax must be free."

"She'd be an old maid by this time."

"She would be twenty-four; her mother's age at the time of the marriage."

"Did you ever see—Lady Fairfax?"

"Once."

"And was she presentable?"

"I thought her one of the finest ladies and most beautiful women I ever met. If her daughter resembles her you are to be congratulated, Sir Reginald."

"It would make no difference to me whether she is humpbacked or a model of loveliness. I am engaged to the Lady Helen Devenish."

"Indeed!"

"Eight hundred a-year and Marshlands is a great contrast from what I expected."

"Sir Isaac seemed positive you would understand his motives."

"I do. I bear him no ill-will. He was influenced by an almost insane dislike to Lady Carteret. Besides, Ashwin, after all, his daughter has the best right to the Castle."

"Miss Fairfax can only enjoy the Castle as your wife, Sir Reginald."

"But surely if I refuse—"

"There is no question of refusal, unless you are married within three years of your uncle's death. The Castle and its revenues will be the property of trustees, to be held until your eldest son, or Miss Fairfax's attains the age of twenty-one, when that lucky young gentleman comes in for the whole, with the savings of one-and-twenty years."

Rex brightened.

"I'm glad my children will own the old place. I am to be married in August, Mr. Ashwin, so I think I have every chance of providing an heir to the estate before my unknown cousin, whom you represent as fancy free."

Mr. Ashwin looked ominously grave.

"You forget," he said, gently, "Lady Helen may think it prudent at least to postpone your wedding."

CHAPTER II.

SOMEWHERE within the four miles radius of Charing-cross, somewhere in densely-populated London, there stands a long, narrow street, whose dingy, depressed-looking houses are for the most part let in lodgings. An eminently respectable place is Malcolm-street, S.E., reader, but anything but cheerful. Its inhabitants have generally seen better days, and now swell the ranks of the shabby-genteel, toiling harder far than upper servants or charwomen, and yet earning a very slender maintenance, to gain even which they must work so incessantly that they have little time to note the dinginess of their surroundings, or to wonder what there is in Malcolm-street so objectionable to the sun as to drive him away from the locality even in bright June.

In the "parlour"—we use the phraseology of the district—of No. 9, Malcolm-street, a young lady lived alone, supporting herself, precariously enough, by the higher branches

of fancy needlework. If only some wealthy patroness could have discovered Beatrice St. John her fortune would have been made; her talents, both for designing and executing elaborate embroidery, would have brought her in an ample sum, but unluckily for her she did not know this. She had only been three years in England, and it was only for one of them that she had had to support herself. She worked for one or two shops, who reaped a rich profit from her exertions, and in return allowed her just enough to keep body and soul together.

She was sitting one June morning, about a week after Rex learnt he was not his uncle's heir, busy at an embroidery frame, making sprays of pomegranate blossoms on panels of black satin, destined to adorn the dress of a young and beautiful peeress. Her ladyship would pay a goodly number of guineas for the same, and Beatrice hoped when her task, which took her many weary hours each day for a week was ended, thirty shillings would find their way into her purse.

She was unusually cheerful to-day. It was so fine that the sun had managed to find his way even into Malcolm-street. Beatrice thought that when the panels were finished even she might take a holiday. Half-a-crown would pay her fare to Kew by boat, there and back, and enable her to have a row on the river, and tea in some of the rural arbours erected for that purpose; besides, it was a bright prospect, a whole afternoon away from smoky London—a whole five hours in the fresh open country. A smile came to the thin face at the bare idea, for Beatrice was country born and bred. She had never been able to leave the great city in which her lot was cast; she was always longing for the clear blue sky, and the fresh green fields.

She was older than Lady Helen Devenish, but she looked younger in spite of hard work and the lines sorrow had written on her face; for the rest she had nothing in common under Reginald's darling. Beatrice was above the middle height; she had a slight drooping figure, large tender blue eyes, hair of brightest gold, a complexion almost too delicate for health, and long, thin white hands. She wore a soft grey dress of the material known as nun's veiling, and there was a knot of crimson ribbon at her throat. The dress was not new; indeed, it bore traces of long wear, but the linen collar and cuffs were spotless; the bright hair was coiled with simple elegance round the small head, and though many might have called Beatrice St. John shabby, no one could have said she looked anything but a lady.

She was singing quietly to herself as she worked, and her thoughts were so full of her expedition to Kew that she paid little attention to the outer world, so she never heard a fly stop at the door and someone give a resounding double knock a minute after, while the landlady, with an expression of extreme surprise, announced,—

"A gentleman to see you, miss."

For one instant Beatrice looked astonished; and then, as she caught sight of the stranger's face, a flood of joyous recognition broke over her own, and she stretched out her two hands in eager greeting.

"Oh, Uncle Will!"

The gentleman took her in his arms and kissed her. He was fifty turned, and yet there was a suspicious moisture in his eyes as he looked at the sweet, pale face.

"I thought you would never come," she whispered. "Mother said you must be dead, or you would never have left us so long without news."

"My dear, when I went away, seven years ago, I made up my mind never to come back unless I had made my fortune. I was a burden to your mother for many years, but when I said good-bye to her last I vowed to myself I'd stay away until I could be a credit to her."

Bee's eyes filled; it was too late now, her mother had been dead more than a year. Did

Uncle Will know it, or must she break the news?

"Yes," he said, in answer to the tender question in her blue eyes, "I got your letter, Bee, but I only got it six months ago. I was doing well then, and I thought I'd not write, but just wind up my affairs and come straight home. I've done rarely well, child; I've made fifty thousand pounds, and it's hard if you and I can't manage to live on the interest of that."

Bee just took his rough, brown hand, and held it in both of hers.

"I should't mind if you'd come back without a penny, Uncle Will, so that I had you, Oh, if you knew the lonely time I have had since mother died."

"And her annuity died with her. How have you managed, child, all this while?"

Bee told him Mr. Carlyle admired the delicate embroidery very much, but he sniffed prodigiously when he heard the rate at which it had been remunerated.

"They've been imposing on you, Bee," he said, decidedly. "I'll warrant someone's been making a pretty profit out of your labour, but that's all over now. We will have a nice little home somewhere in the country, and I will see what an old man can do to make you happy."

"You're not old, uncle!"

"Not far from sixty, Bee. There were ten years between me and your mother, poor girl!"

"You loved her very much, Uncle Will?"

"I loved her better than anything on earth, but I couldn't make her happy, Bee. I had to stand by and see her suffer—as I hope few women do suffer—without being able to spare her a single pang. You're not so beautiful as she was, Bee; Heaven grant you'll not be so unhappy."

Bee remembered he had always spoken in this strain. She had been a slip of a girl in her teens when Uncle Will left England, but even then he had often told her she ought to be thankful she had not inherited her mother's beauty. In his opinion beauty and misfortune went together.

"Mamma was always sad," said Bee, thoughtfully.

"She wasn't," retorted Uncle Will, almost as though Bee had maligned his sister's memory. "She was the life of the house when she was a child. Some great lady took a fancy to her just because she was so merry. Mary used to go and sing to her, and when she died she left her a hundred a-year, just out of gratitude, because she had cheered her last days."

"Mamma was very good," said Bee; "the sweetest, best of mothers, but I can't fancy her cheerful."

"Because her heart was broken before ever you were born. I'm not a revengeful man, Bee; I never bear anyone malice, but if there's anything would have given me real pleasure it's to have stood up face to face with your father, and told him what I thought of his conduct. Then I'd just have put a bullet through his head and have left him."

"Perhaps he suffered too," said Bee, slowly; "and it is so long ago I am sure mamma forgave him."

"She never allowed there was anything to forgive. You take my advice, Bee, and steer clear of love. I'll make a nice little home for you, and you shall have your own way in everything. Just let marrying alone, no good ever comes of it."

Bee smiled.

"I don't think you need be afraid. I never thought of such a thing, Uncle Will?"

"You are quite sure?"

"I don't think I ever spoke to a gentleman in my life under fifty."

"Quite right," said Mr. Carlyle, approvingly. "Bee, you'll make a better thing of your life than your poor mother did."

Bee did not answer; she had never heard the rights of her mother's story, only that she had loved and lost, had been married, and

lost her husband by a separation as cruel as death. The only thing she knew of her father was that from him she inherited his blue eyes. When he died, where he was buried, what position in life he filled, she had no idea; only from her mother's shrinking from all acquaintances Bee had fancied her unknown father must have moved in society, and his widow kept in strict retirement lest his child should be brought suddenly in contact with any of his kin.

"Where shall we take a house?" demanded Mr. Carlyle. "You know, Bee, I shall not let you stay here any longer; the air of this place can't be good for you. You look like a little white ghost."

"I should like to live near the river," said Bee, quietly. "Uncle Will, let us have a furnished cottage somewhere near the Thames till the summer is over, and then we can think of something else."

"And you'll tell these people," jerking his head in the direction of the embroidery frame, "that you'll have nothing more to do with them."

Half-an-hour's work would finish Bee's last panel, so she readily consented. Mr. Carlyle actually sat patiently while she put those last stitches; then the two relations set out—Bee to carry the last memorial of her toil to her employers, Mr. Carlyle to a house-agent's to procure a list of desirable cottage residences near the Thames, which were to be let furnished for the summer months.

She had to wait some time. The fashionable *modiste* who employed her had no scruples about taking up Miss St. John's leisure; and as she sat looking at the marvels of elegant millinery around her she suddenly overheard a discussion between Madame herself and one of her assistants.

"Another toilette for Lady Helen Devenish? Certainly not. Miss Mills, you must be stupid to ask such a question. You know I shall send nothing more to that house until my bill is paid in full."

"But Lady Helen is on the point of marriage," suggested the assistant. "For the sake of her future custom surely—"

"Her future custom won't be worth a rap. Captain Fairfax is disinherited. He has nothing but a bare eight hundred a-year to keep up the baronetcy on. If my Lady Helen is the woman I take her for she'll break off the engagement. Eight hundred a-year! Why it wouldn't dress her respectably, let alone anything else."

The words made little impression on Bee at the time, but they were destined to recur to her again and again.

Madame condescended to remember Miss St. John, and even commended the panels. She had several other commissions; but Bee declined.

"I am not going to undertake any more needlework," she said, simply.

Horrified at the idea of losing her, Madame affected to think it was a question of money, and offered double and treble her former terms, so that Bee understood her uncle's idea was correct; she had been imposed upon. She gave Madame no reason for her sudden rebellion, but, with a firm refusal, left the room.

She seemed to walk on air that bright June day. Her toil was over. Uncle Will had come back. They would be happy together. Everything looked fair in her future. She did not even regret the mother who had left her not two years before. That mother's heart had been broken before her child's birth.

Bee knew that it would have been cruel to wish to recall her to earth, and so there was nothing to alloy the strange happiness that seemed to have dawned for the girl.

Uncle Will would return at five to conduct Beatrice to his hotel. She had barely two hours to pack up, pay her landlady's bill, and prepare to leave the only London home she had ever known.

She admitted herself with a latch-key, and

went straight to her little sitting-room. Then she started. What a day of surprises this was to be her! Here in her own abode, comfortably ensconced in an armchair, sat a perfect stranger.

He did not seem in the least disconcerted at the arrival of the lady of the domain. He rose and bowed courteously.

"Miss St. John, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your mother's name was Mary. She was the daughter of a Mr. James Carlyle."

Bee bent her head in token of assent. She really felt too perplexed to speak.

"My dear young lady, I am delighted to have found you. I am the bearer of most important tidings. You must not regard me with suspicion. For thirty years I was your father's confidential friend and adviser."

"I never knew my father, sir."

Mr. Ashwin sighed.

"He was a good man, and true; the one mistake of his life was that when jilted by a mercenary woman. He married out of pique a creature so sensitive that the discovery he did not love her well-nigh broke her heart."

"That was my mother!" said Bee, quickly.

"Sir, do you think I can have kindly thoughts of the man who broke her heart?"

"I think you will forgive him as she did. Miss St. John, they are reunited now, and there are no misgivings between them—your father died almost suddenly last week!"

Beatrice started.

"I always thought he died when I was born? I was given to understand so!"

"No. His last thoughts were of you, his last business cares were to assure your future!"

"My future is secure already. Had you come two hours later you would have found me gone."

"And where?"

"My mother's brother has returned from America with a large fortune; his one object is to make a home for me."

"You will not need it. By your father's will you inherit a London mansion and a hundred thousand pounds in funded property."

"I don't want it."

"I fear you must take it!"

Bee's eyes filled with tears.

"It will disappoint my uncle cruelly! He has come home so happy at the thought of providing for me! How can I tell him I don't need his help?"

"There is no occasion to tell him at once; indeed, you might keep the secret for an indefinite time. I have the honour to be appointed your guardian, and I can manage your property without troubling you; I shall only require your signature occasionally and your correct address, so that I can send you the interest of your fortune."

Bee faltered.

"Do you mean I am rich?"

"You have three thousand a-year even if your property remains in the funds; your house in Belgravia is usually let for three hundred. It is a superb mansion!"

"I don't want it!" said Bee, helplessly.

"Sir, I know you mean all kindness, but I wish you had not found me. Uncle Will and I meant to be so happy, and this news will be a bitter grief to him. He cannot bear any mention of my father."

"My dear young lady!" said the lawyer, gently, "you are troubling yourself without any need! Unless you tell him, Mr. Carlyle will never know of your inheritance. If I send you the interest of your fortune twice a year, you can forget the circumstances in the intervals."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. I have one thing more to ask—you will not think me inquisitive? Are you engaged?"

Bee smiled.

"Uncle Will asked me that very thing this morning! No, Mr. Ashwin, I am not engaged!"

I never mean to be. I shall remain plain Beatrice St. John to the end of my days!"

The lawyer looked up quickly.

"You surely are aware St. John is merely an assumed name? Your mother bore it on the stage. She went back to it when she parted from her husband."

"Then what is my real name?"

"Mary Fairfax."

"Not even Beatrice?"

"No; you are Mary Fairfax, only child of the late Sir Isaac Fairfax, of Fairfax Castle, and first cousin of the new baronet, Captain Sir Reginald Fairfax. But this can make no difference; you are of age, and your own mistress. If you choose to call yourself Miss St. John, no one can prevent it."

Bee's eyes filled with tears.

"I feel as if I had been a living fraud all these years!" she said, piteously; "nothing about me was true, not even my name!"

"Don't grieve," said Mr. Ashwin, kindly; "indeed, you have no cause. It seems to me, Miss St. John, your future is a very fair one, fairer far than your cousin's."

Bee recollected the fragments of conversation she had overheard.

"Do you mean that Captain Fairfax is my cousin, Mr. Ashwin?"

"Yes; he is Sir Reginald now."

"And he has been disinherited for my sake?"

"He has Marshlands, a small country estate, and eight hundred a year, but he had expected Fairfax Castle and its revenues."

"Can't he have them? Couldn't I give them back to him?"

"My dear," returned the old man, touched by her generosity, "he could not take such a gift at your hands; besides, they are not yours to give."

"Whose then?"

Mr. Ashwin looked at her shrewdly.

"Fairfax Castle and its twenty thousand a-year will be Sir Reginald's on one condition."

"And that is?"

"That he marries you within three years of his uncle's death."

"It is an insult to us both."

"Hardly that. If you refuse you are amply provided for. Sir Reginald also has enough to make both ends meet. The reason of the bequest was to save him from being married for his money."

"But he is engaged!"

"How do you know?"

"I have heard it."

"It was true enough; but Lady Helen Devenish is her mother's true daughter. She gave your cousin his *congé* directly she learned he was not the heir of Fairfax."

"How he must hate you."

"I think he hates all women at present. He will throw himself into his professional duties, and try to forget the sex exists. As to Fairfax Castle, have you no curiosity to know the fate of the grand old place if you and your cousin decline to be one?"

"We shall decline."

"Then Fairfax passes to the eldest son of Sir Reginald or yourself on his majority."

"I hope I shall never see him."

"Whom?"

"Sir Reginald."

"I don't think there is the least chance of it," said Mr. Ashwin, cheerfully. "To tell you the truth, he indulges in a fixed belief you are dead."

Bee laughed, she really could not help it. It was the first bit of levity into which she had been betrayed. The idea of Captain Fairfax jumping to such a conclusion seemed preposterous.

"Would that change things?"

"It would ensure the estates to Sir Reginald's son."

"He is quite sure of them now; I shall never marry. Why, I was twenty-four the other day, and I have never had an offer."

"I am surprised to hear it."

"The fact is I know no gentlemen, and my

mother had a strange dread of my marrying. I think Uncle Will is like her; they both disapproved of young men and that sort of thing."

"Did they?" said Mr. Ashwin, much amused. "Well, if ever the right young man turns up I hope you will have the courage to renounce their advice; and as your father's tried and trusted friend, I hope you will allow me to draw the settlement?"

Bee smiled.

"I may safely promise that."

"I am very glad we have met," went on the lawyer, warmly, "and, Miss Fairfax—I must call you so for once—remember this interview need not change the happy plans you had made for a peaceful home with your uncle. You must keep me informed of your address, and sign a formal receipt twice a year when I send your dividend, and really I think that's all the trouble that will devolve upon you for being an heiress."

Bee smiled.

"You say you loved my father? For his sake will you promise me one favour?"

"A dozen if I can!"

"One will be all sufficient—never mention this interview to my cousin."

"I'm afraid I must; you see, it will be necessary to tell him I have seen you."

"Then I can change the form of my request; never tell him the name I bear, or that I am the niece of William Carlyle."

"Ah, that I can promise you readily, though I confess I cannot guess your motive."

She blushed.

"I fancy Uncle Will and I shall travel. Wide as is the world chance meetings are always happening. Should we come across Sir Reginald in our wanderings I think I should sink into the earth with shame if he knew I was the wife his uncle had intended for him."

"I wish you could meet."

"We shall not; it isn't in the least likely. I am only guarding against improbable emergencies by my request; but I have your promise, and now I am content."

"And I have yours."

"I really forget which."

"That I should draw your marriage settlements. Remember, Miss Fairfax, I shall hold you to your word."

She smiled.

"That promise is never to be fulfilled, because there never will be any settlements. Wouldn't it do as well if I promised you should make my will?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I hope I shall be gathered to my fathers long before you have to contemplate that step."

"I have always wished to die young," said Bee, thoughtfully; "I never could see any good in growing old."

"Wait."

She had risen to go; he took the girl's hand in his, and looked gravely into her face.

"You are very like your father."

"Am I?"

"And yet I can trace a resemblance to your mother. My dear, I hope your fate may be happier than hers; and remember, Miss Fairfax, if ever I can be of any use to you you have only to summon me—a line would bring me to your aid at any time."

"Thank you," she said, earnestly. "Remember, Mr. Ashwin, I trust you entirely—I am sure you will not forget your promise."

He was gone; the clock chimed five, and Mary Fairfax, alias Beatrice St. John, started up; not one of her preparations was made, and at any moment now her uncle might arrive to bear her away.

She rang the bell, and told the landlady of the change in her life. She paid a fortnight's rent in lieu of notice; it seemed an earnest of her future wealth to be able to give the kind, poverty-stricken widow a handsome present out of the pile of sovereigns Uncle Will had left her.

Then the packing began. Bee took with her

nothing but her scanty wardrobe and a few memories of her mother—everything else she left for the landlady's benefit. By dint of great haste and plenty of assistance from the widow Bee contrived to look the second trunk as Uncle Will, half-an-hour behind time and in a desperate hurry, stopped at the door in the very same fly which had brought him in the morning, and which his niece firmly believed he had kept in his service the whole day.

"That is over," said Uncle Will, as the man sprang to the box and drove them rapidly away from Malcolm-street. "Bee, it shall not be my fault, child, if I don't make you happy."

Bee smiled a little wistfully.

"I am sure to be happy with you, dear."

And then he went on to tell her of the house he had taken at Kew—a tiny, bijou villa, with gardens sloping down to the silvery waters of Father Thames. There was a basket-carriage left and a pair of cream-coloured ponies, just the thing for Bee to drive about in. The old traveller was as delighted as a child, and in his enjoyment Bee almost forgot the exciting interview that had just taken place.

One thing she longed to know and could not bring herself to ask—had Uncle Will ever heard the real name of his sister's husband?

Even this was to come to her. After dinner, which was served in their private sitting-room, Mr. Carlyle inscribed his name in the hotel visitors' book. He hesitated just a little, and then wrote "William Carlyle and niece."

"I wish I could give you my name, child," he said, half sadly, as he laid down the pen. "Beatrice Carlyle would have a pretty sound, and as 'tis I can never hear thee spoken to without thinking of the wretch who broke thy mother's heart."

"His name was not St. John."

"It must have been."

"Why?"

"I was away five years. When I came back the tragedy of your mother's life was over. I left her Miss Carlyle, I found her Mrs. St. John."

"I know it is not my father's name; my mother called herself St. John when she went upon the stage; and she went back to it afterwards because, like you, she could not bear any sound that reminded her of my father."

"I am very glad; I shall like it better now. Beatrice St. John! It has a pretty sound."

"When shall we go to Kew, uncle?"

"Not till next week; we've a heap to do first, Bee. There are two women-servants left and a boy to look after the ponies, but I think you ought to have a maid."

"Please not," said Bee, laughing; "indeed, there would be nothing for her to do."

"I would rather," said Mr. Carlyle, in his stately manner; "you know I feel responsible to your mother, Bee. You are under my protection now."

And so, for very affection's sake, Beatrice yielded the point. An advertisement was inserted in the *Times*, and "young persons" waited on her at the hotel between ten and eleven. The third applicant impressed her favourably. She was a pleasant-mannered girl, and confessed a preference for a country life.

"You see, ma'am," she said, simply, "I'm not used to late hours. I'm in Lady Carteret's services now, and it's four most mornings before I'm in bed. I have to sit up for Lady Helen and then undress her, and my health won't stand it."

"And that is the only reason for your leaving?"

"Not quite, ma'am"—and the girl blushed.

"I'd never been in a grand family before, and I didn't know it was the custom to pay the wages only once a year. I went to the Countess in March, and I looked for my five pounds last week, which was quarter-day, but Lady Helen said better class people never paid their servants but once in twelve months, and if that didn't suit me I had better leave."

"I think you will do for me," said Bee,

brightly; "and I shall pay you once a month. I suppose I can have a character from Lady Carteret?"

"Yes, ma'am; the Countess said she would see any lady between eleven and twelve."

"I shall have time to go this morning," decided Bee, a little interested in a visit to the house of those so intermingled with her own history.

She knew already that Lady Carteret had been her father's curse and her mother's destroyer. It was passing strange she should be, through her father's will, the means of disappointing that lady's daughter of her fiancé.

Bee thought privately Lady Helen must be very like her mother, or she would not have let mere money matters come between her and Rex.

Conscious that here were people who judged by appearances, Bee dressed herself in one of the new dainty toilettes provided for her by her uncle's kindness. Mr. Carlyle had spent a week in Paris, apparently for the express purpose of buying pretty dresses for his niece.

Attired in a delicate French cambric, trimmed with quantities of real lace, a shady hat with drooping ostrich feathers, Miss St. John looked her best.

It was early, so early that Lady Helen had not cared to make a toilet when she appeared. She looked sorrowful, unhealthy, and—it must be confessed—untidy. Her soiled wrapper would not bear inspection by the side of Bee's snowy cambric; late hours, excitement, and perpetual bothers over money matters made her features look worn and sharp. Bee, who had heard of her as a queen of beauty, was greatly disappointed.

Lady Helen was perfectly civil; indeed, amiable for her. She said Emma Molland was a steady, respectable girl, but very stupid and over-scrupulous. She would doubtless do well in the country; she was not in the least suited for a fashionable life.

"It must be very wearing," said Bee, involuntarily.

Lady Helen stared. She recognised the faultless Parisian costume, the easy, high-bred manner; surely this tall, graceful maiden did not wish to imply she did not move in fashion's circle?

"Are you a stranger in London?" she asked, graciously. "I do not think I have met you in society."

"I have lived in London three years, but my mother's delicate health, and then her death, combined to keep me very much at home."

Lady Helen threw up her hands.

"You could live in London and do without gaiety and amusement? Miss St. John, you must be a stoic!"

Bee smiled.

"I think," she said, gently, "we may pay too high a price even for gaiety and amusements."

Those words rang in Helen's ears when she was left alone, for almost similar words had been spoken by her lover not many days before.

The afternoon following his uncle's funeral found Rex at Lady Carteret's. He sent in his name, Sir Reginald Fairfax, and the servant ushered him into a tiny retreat, where Helen sat alone expecting him. Very pleasant did the announcement fall upon her ears. To them "Sir" had a far more welcome sound than the simple Captain.

"Oh, Rex, how could you stay away from me so long?"

"Have you missed me, darling?"

"Horribly!"

"Well, I am here now, and I pray it may be long before we have another parting. Nell, I have some bad news for you."

"Bad news!"

He had drawn her nearer to himself. He was looking at her with a wealth of tenderness in his deep blue eyes.

"You love me, Nell, don't you?"

"You know I do,"

"Well enough to bear a little trouble for my sake? Well, I let you the heir to twenty thousand a year; I come back a poor man."

Helen started. She raised her head from his shoulder; she would have released herself from his embrace, but the clasp of his arms was all too close.

"Sir Isaac can't have disinherited you?"

"He has."

Helen was positively silent. The very immensity and suddenness of the calamity made her speechless.

"But we shall have enough for comfort," went on Rex, hopelessly, "though riches and grandeur are out of the question. My uncle has left me a country house called Marshlands and eight hundred a-year. Plenty for a simple home life, Nell."

Nell thought otherwise. It was the exact amount of her mother's jointure, and never within her recollection had Lady Carteret called it plenty.

She was too angry to try to conceal her disappointment. The mark of disinterestedness she had always assumed before Rex dropped with a vengeance now.

"I call it wicked!" she cried, bitterly. "What right had Sir Isaac to give it out that you were his heir, and go deceiving people in this fashion?"

"I don't think he ever gave it out that I was his heir," returned Reginald, gravely.

"Well, I'm sure we always thought so."

"Nell," he said, passionately, "do you mean that this will make any difference to you?"

"It must," she returned, snappishly, "all the difference in the world."

"You cannot go to Court, or have an opera-box, or spend as much as we expected, but with my pay we should have about twelve hundred a-year. Nell, don't you think you could be happy on that with me?"

"No."

"It would be enough for comfort," persisted Rex. "You would not have to pinch or scrape. We could live as gentlefolks without fear of debt, and, Nell, we should have each other. Don't you care enough for me to give up a few of luxuries we had hoped to enjoy?"

"It would be beggary."

His manner changed.

"It would not; it would be sufficient for a simple domestic life. You would need to do nothing derogatory to your rank; and, oh! Helen, my love should stand between you and all trouble!"

"It is impossible," said Helen, stiffly, excommunicating herself at last from his embrace.

"And that is your answer?"

"It is."

"You have not thought of my disappointment—of my broken hopes?"

"You will get over it. I wasn't made for poverty or domesticity, Rex. You would be perfectly wretched if you married me on a small income. I have not been brought up to be useful. Excitement and pleasure are as necessary to me as the air I breathe."

"You may pay too dear a price for them."

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Sir Reginald, but you have your uncle to thank. He should not have placed you in such an absurd position."

"Yes, I have him to thank," said Rex, slowly. "I understand his meaning now. Well, he has had his wish. I am saved from being married for my money."

The last words were spoken in such a low tone that they hardly reached her ear; she only replied to the first part of the sentence.

"It is Sir Isaac's fault entirely, Sir Reginald. Any girl in the world who had been entrapped into an engagement blindfold like this would do as I do and demand her freedom."

"You have it," said Rex, bitterly, "and I pray from the bottom of my heart a day may never come when you regret your decision. You have cast my honest love from you with scorn. You think the affection of a man's

whole heart worthless. Lady Helen, I offer you no reproach; I only trust you may never regret the moment when you sacrificed us both to your cruel ambition."

He did not offer to shake hands with her; he did not even wait for an answer. He walked out of the room, opened the hall door and passed into the street—one page in his life closed for ever.

"He will marry Miss Fairfax, and unite the estate and title," said the Countess, when Sir Isaac's will became public. "Of course it is a good thing for him, but I consider you have been treated abominably, my dear."

"It doesn't matter," said Helen, coldly. "We are not likely to meet Sir Reginald and his bride; our paths in life lay wide enough apart."

But a sigh accompanied her words, and the Countess looked up sharply.

"Surely, Helen, you are not mad enough to regret your decision. What would your life have been with eight hundred a-year and a dozen children—poor people always have enormous families."

"I regret nothing," said Helen, coldly, "except that all the wearisome work has to begin again, mamma. I am quite willing to take up the dreary task again, only remember one thing, I will not listen to discussions about my affair with Sir Reginald Fairfax; his name is never to be mentioned between us, whether it ended well or ill; whether we have done right or wrong I decline to argue. Let things be as they would have been if Mrs. Burn had never introduced him to us."

And the Countess, astonished at her daughter's imperious commands, meekly promised obedience; but the idea came to her and sank deeply in her mind that whatever heart a fashionable education had left remaining in Lady Helen's aristocratic breast had been given to the young Captain.

CHAPTER III.

It was more than a year since Sir Isaac's death, and his nephew was almost forgotten by fashionable London. A baronet with only eight hundred a-year and a captain's pay was not worth remembering in good society; besides, Sir Reginald had quite deserted his old haunts from the moment he knew that Helen was false to him, that he had staked his happiness on her truth—and lost. He eschewed all festive scenes. He was popular as ever with his brother officers. Among men he was his old self, gay, cheerful, and sympathetic, but he never willingly met a woman. He seemed to have become a misanthrope as far as the fair sex was concerned.

"It's no use your talking, Ashwin," he said one August evening, when he had been entertaining the old lawyer at Marshlands, the only place where he could wield a seigneur's authority now. "What you say may be very true. I daresay it is folly to despise all women for the sake of one; but you don't know how I believed in her. I thought Helen would be constant through all adversity."

"You will marry, and forget her."

"I am not good at forgetting."

"Well, you'll marry, and not forget her."

"I am not in the least likely to marry. I am sufficiently proud to refuse to wed any but gentle blood, and no lady would demean herself by attempting housekeeping on eight hundred a-year. Don't look so troubled, old friend; there are more things in life than love and marriage, and I don't doubt a bachelor's lot has many advantages."

Mr. Ashwin sighed.

"It's very strange," he said, speaking aloud, almost unconsciously. "I'm an old man, and I've no children of my own to plan marriages for. It does seem hard the only two people I have to be interested in should both exhibit such a strange aversion to wedded bliss."

Sir Reginald laughed.

"What! have you another misanthrope on your hands? Who is he? You might introduce him to me, sir, then we could console

with each other on your match-making tendencies."

"I should not think of performing such an introduction, Sir Reginald."

"Why? Is he a very grand personage, quite above associating with a paper baronet? You might confide his name to me, Ashwin, and trust to my honour not to foist myself upon his notice."

"You are talking at random, Sir Reginald. The friend I referred to was a young lady."

"In—deed!" Rex laughed wickedly. "I didn't know you went in for young lady friends. I suppose she is a blighted being, who, having loved and been disappointed, like myself, declines to try her luck a second time."

"Certainly not."

"She is doubtless waiting for a noble partner."

"She does not mean to accept any partner. I saw her yesterday and began to reason with her; but she only smiled, and told me she was happier than most of the married people of her acquaintance."

"Quite a philosopher! Dare I ask her name?"

"Beatrice St. John."

"Beatrice St. John! It sounds too romantic for a young lady with such peculiar views. How old is she?"

"Under thirty."

"And an heiress?"

"She lives with an old uncle. I know nothing of his circumstances, but expect she will come in for a trifle at his death."

"Strong-minded female! May it be enough to keep her in strong tea and tracts. Don't worry over her foibles, Mr. Ashwin; you look quite bothered. You had better devote your energies to finding my unknown cousin, Mary Fairfax. Who knows, as you are such a determined match-maker, you might succeed in marrying her after your own heart! It would be a sort of consolation for your failures with me and Miss St. John."

"I have quite given up seeking Miss Fairfax."

"You are coming round to my opinion that she is dead."

"I am not; but I see no particular object in discovering her. You are determined not to marry her, so what is the use in finding her?"

"I am a great trouble to you," said Rex, dropping his laughing tone, and speaking with honest regret. "Do you know, Ashwin, I think my uncle's will has caused as much worry to you as to anyone."

"Lady Helen Devenish would not agree with you."

"Don't speak of her by that name. Don't you know she was married six weeks ago at St. George's, Hanover-square, to a cotton millionaire."

"Really!"

"He was fifty-five," said Rex, drily, "and his hair was scarcely him. No, scantier; but he had gold enough to atone for these shortcomings, and to shed sufficient lustre upon the homely name of Johnson as to induce Lady Helen to accept it."

"I am very glad she is married."

"Are you? Did you live in dread of her relenting and recalling me? I daresay I shall meet her next week. The happy pair are travelling in Germany, and you know I start to-morrow for a tour up the Rhine."

"You don't seem alarmed at the prospect."

"I think I can survive it. I mean to be famous yet, Ashwin. Perhaps, when my name is great in the artistic world, I shall forgive Lady Helen for her prudery."

"It is wonderful how you've taken to painting lately," admitted the lawyer. "I shouldn't wonder if you made quite a tidy income by your pictures in a few years' time."

"Don't!" said Rex, with mock horror, "don't be so mercenary. I don't want money, I only want ambition—fame. You know, a love of art is almost an inheritance in the Fairfax family. But for my being cut out of

the Castle I might never have discovered I was born to be a painter."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Ashwin, ponderingly, "men are no better than women."

"Did I ever say they were? But what has reduced you to such a sad conclusion?"

"When women don't marry they start a hobby. Well, it seems to me that's just what you've done."

"Has Miss St. John a hobby?"

"If she has it suits her," was the enigmatical reply. "She's a good-hearted, honest-minded woman!"

Rex pictured a tall, angular spinster of twenty-nine, with the scantiest wiry red hair and the smallest of grey eyes. This party doubtless wore a poke bonnet and a rusty black dress, and the hobby so suited to her must be that of delivering tracts—no other could be so congenial.

"Well, I start to-morrow, Ashwin, and I shall be gone several weeks, perhaps three months; if you hear anything of Miss Fairfax during my absence you might let me know?"

The lawyer nodded.

"And don't fret yourself over my and Miss St. John's delinquencies!"

"I'm not likely to do that; there's no use in it. You had better leave me your address."

"Post Restante, Dusseldorf, until you hear to the contrary. I shall keep very much in one place I expect, and make short excursions from it. I have three months' leave of absence, so don't be surprised if I wait till November to return!"

Mr. Ashwin wrote a foreign letter the next day. It was a very short one. He had been introduced to Mr. Carlyle by his niece as a "friend who had known her mother," and the result was that a strong intimacy had sprung up between the two elderly gentlemen; and Mr. Ashwin felt no scruple at asking a favour of the returned emigrant.

"A young friend of mine, Reginald Bertram, will soon be passing through your neighbourhood on a sketching tour. He is a fine young fellow, and any kindness you can show him I shall regard as a personal favour. Tell Miss Bee you need not fear my thoughts were on match-making, for my artist friend has almost as strong an objection to such things as herself."

The lawyer rubbed his hands when he had sent that letter to the post.

"There," he said, with a grin of triumph, "I think that's a good stroke of business; they're safe to meet now, and surely as they don't know, what a remarkably wise thing it would be to fall in love with each other. They may be trusted to do it. I shall have a lot to answer for, to old Carlyle, though, if they do."

The cottage at Kew had been a great success. Mr. Carlyle and his niece spent four happy months there, then they came to London for the winter, and went abroad in the end of May.

Beatrice and her uncle lived in a simple, unpretentious fashion; they kept no company, maintained no style or ceremony, but wherever they were they managed to enjoy themselves and secure a very fair share of amusement; and so far from exceeding their means in the twelve months they had been together, they had spent little more than half the yearly interest on Mr. Carlyle's fortune.

It was Bee's doing they came abroad. She had always been fond of art; now that her time was her own she wanted to devote a good deal of it to her painting. Mr. Carlyle was just the kind of man to enjoy the scrambling, diverting life of an Englishman abroad, so the two pitched their tent in a very pretty little house in a quaint German town, and proceeded to enjoy themselves—Bee by spending many an hour in the lovely scenery adjacent to their home and trying to reproduce its beauties on canvas, Mr. Carlyle by cultivating an intimate acquaintance with all sorts

of German dishes, and making a list (short) of those he liked, and another (copious) of those that fit to set before a pig."

They had been engaged at these occupations quite three months when Mr. Ashwin's letter arrived. Uncle Will put on his spectacles and read it leisurely through; Bee peeped over his shoulder, and took in the gist at a single glance.

"Mr. Bertram! It's a pretty name, but we don't want him. Let's have a bad memory, Uncle Will, and forget all about this letter."

"Why, dear?"

"He's a young man," said Bee, severely, "and you know we both dislike young men!"

"But Mr. Ashwin says he's nice!"

"That makes it worse! He'll be a kind of model young man, and I detest pigs!"

"Perhaps he won't come to Wenigsdorf."

"Perhaps he won't. We won't look at the arrival lists, Uncle Will, and whenever anyone wants to tell us anything about artists we won't pretend to hear; then, even if the prodigy does come, we need not know anything about it."

And when a month passed and they never heard the name of Bertram, they began to believe themselves secure from any demands upon their hospitality.

It was a lovely September day, and Bee had sallied forth with her easel. She was sitting on a camp stool on the top of a hill whence the silver Rhine lay sheltered before her in dreamy beauty.

Bee was painting the river as it appeared from that lonely hill. She meant to call her picture a "Peep of Rhineland."

Some cows browsing in the distance were the only traces of life. The sunshine fell upon the waters, the brown tint of the foliage, the dead leaves upon the ground—all fitted in with her fancy, and, absorbed in her subject, she worked quickly and well.

Bee loved painting dearly. What a contrast between her life now, when she needed only to exercise her slender fingers to please her own fancy, and the days when she had to work hard, early and late, to keep body and soul together!

It was a very different Bee from the girl Uncle Will had found in Malcom-street. She looked younger and stronger. She had been pretty as a delicate fragile flower then; she was lovely now, with all the radiance of health and happiness.

The breeze fell upon her soft hair, and stirred its waves from their keeping; her cheeks were round and coloured with a sweet carnation bloom; and her dark blue eyes were still full of a deep, thoughtful tenderness.

She was no longer the lonely, overtaken worker in Malcom-street. Those days had left their mark on her. You saw this in the pathos of her expression, the wistfulness of her changing smile. Sorrow had added a charm to her face no after-years of prosperity could ever quite destroy.

She was so engrossed in her own work that she never saw another easel raised almost by the side of hers, never noticed that another artist seemed desirous of conveying that bright scene to canvas.

She worked on unceasingly until some big drops of rain fell upon her face. The sky seemed to have turned dark and lowering. Clearly they were going to have a storm.

Bee's first thought was her picture. When she had arranged her mackintosh so as to form a kind of tent over that, she really did not very much mind how furiously the rain came down. Umbrella she had none, and, her cloak being sacrificed to her canvas, she was fairly at the mercy of the elements.

"Allow me."

She looked up. A young man was standing at her side with an open umbrella.

She shook her head.

"You will get wet yourself."

"Not at all; I have my overcoat."

She hesitated.

"Let us share it, then," said Sir Reginald, with that strange smile of his that used to be

thought so charming before his change of fortune; "there is plenty of room beneath it for two heads."

Bee laughed.

"Thank you," she said, frankly. "I shall be glad not to get wet, for this is only a shower, and I want to do another hour's work before I go home."

"You are staying at Wenigsdorf?"

"Oh, yes; we have a house here for the summer."

"It seems a pretty place."

"It is lovely. I don't think I ever enjoyed anything so much as the scenery here."

"You are fond of painting."

"I love it dearly. My one ambition is to exhibit at the Academy."

"I don't think you will have to wait long, judging by the canvas I saw this morning."

She blushed.

"If I only dared to hope so!"

"You mean to make art your profession?"

"Yes—if I can."

Rex took the words to mean she was ambitious of gaining her bread by her brush; that, beautiful and gently born as she evidently was, she yet needed to earn her living. He felt a great regret and pity for her. He forgot she was a young lady; he looked on her as a brave girl struggling nobly.

"You will succeed," he said, kindly; "I wish I felt as sure of myself."

"And are not you?"

"I am like you. I love art dearly, but I have another profession, and I find the claims of the two conflicting at times."

"Art brooks no rival," said Bee, simply; "she must have all or nothing."

It came to Rex as a sudden revelation that Art had little chance of being all to this girl long. She was so beautiful, there was such a charm in her face and manner, she would never be left to lead a lonely life; sooner or later love would claim her as his victim.

"Are you here alone?" he asked, suddenly.

He could see her ungloved hand, but it was doubled, so that he was not sure the third finger was bare of rings. Of course it was nothing to him, nothing in the world, only he did feel curious to know whether she bore the emblem of a fiancée.

"Oh, no! my uncle is with me; we could not be separated. He doesn't like the place quite so well as I do, but he is very happy here. He is studying German dishes; I accuse him of a design to bring out a new cookery book when we go home, but he says he is only learning what to take and what to avoid."

Rex smiled.

"I am sure 'home' means England. You must be English from your face."

"Home means England, but I don't think I am English."

"Aren't you sure about it?"

"No," and she shook her head dolefully; "both uncle and I are ignorant in points of law. Now I was born in America; doesn't that make me a Yankee?"

"I cannot enlighten you, but I believe not."

"I had rather be English."

They were interrupted; a tall, weather-beaten man had come up to them, and was looking at Bee with a surprised face.

"It has been raining, uncle," said Bee, perceiving for the first time the storm was over, "and this gentleman has kindly been giving me the shelter of his umbrella."

"I am much obliged to you, sir," said Mr. Carlyle, bowing courteously to the stranger. "Bee, I heard some bad news in the market, so I thought I would come and tell you, child."

Rex lingered, he hardly liked to go without some sort of farewell; so, much as he disliked to seem an eavesdropper, he kept his place.

"What is it?" said Bee, with the careless hopefulness of those who have little to fear.

"It's all my fault," said Mr. Carlyle, penitently; "I met Mrs. Jones and began to talk

to her. I quite forgot you told me not to listen to any news."

Bee's face took a comic expression of dismay.

"I can guess the rest," she said, pathetically. "Mr. Bertram has come."

"Yes."

"How could you let her tell you, Uncle Will?" said his fair mentress, severely. "There is no help for it now; we shall have to know him."

"Perhaps he won't stay long."

Bee shrugged her shoulders.

"The mischief is done now we know he is here. After that of course you must call on him at once; we couldn't be rude to a friend of Mr. Ashwin's. Go now, there's a dear. I suppose you had better invite him to dinner. Oh! I hope he isn't very young. Mr. Ashwin needn't have told us about him."

Mr. Carlyle departed; the sun had come back. Bee returned to her painting. Rex, bewildered at hearing himself discussed under his *nom de plume*, had retreated to his own easel, wondering if he ought at once to proclaim his own identity, and thus save Bee's uncle a useless call.

The two artists left off painting at the same time; both had to walk down the hill, and Mr. Bertram once more advanced to Bee and begged to be allowed to carry her easel.

"Thanks," she said, lightly; "I fear it is giving you a great deal of trouble."

"Not in the least," they were fairly on the way now. "Will you pardon me if I say something? I could not help overhearing some of your conversation, and I fear, through my kind friend, Mr. Ashwin's, mistaken zeal, I have already been a great nuisance to you and your uncle."

"You can't mean—"

"Only that I am Reginald Bertram."

Bee came to a dead stop.

"Oh dear, what can you think of us?"

"Nothing very dreadful."

"You see," said Bee, speaking very fast, "I never saw a young man—to speak to, I mean—in my life, and Uncle Will has been in Australia a great deal and don't know much about young men, and so—"

"And so," persisted Rex.

"When we got Mr. Ashwin's letter we didn't know what in the world to do. We live very simply, and we are quite behind the world. We thought the grand stuck-up young man would consider an introduction to us a great infliction. At last we came to the conclusion we would try not to know when he came."

"I assure you I am neither grand nor stuck-up. I have very few friends, and it would have been a real pleasure to me to see something of people who know dear old Ashwin so well; but don't be afraid, I won't be any trouble to you and your uncle."

"Mr. Bertram, you are quite misunderstanding me. If you will take us as you find us, and not turn up your nose at colonial ways and my *gaucheries*, we shall be delighted to see you. Mr. Ashwin is a great friend of mine. He may have mentioned my name to you—Beatrice St. John."

"You can't be Miss St. John."

"I am."

"Then it must be another Miss St. John he told me of. It couldn't be you."

"Why not?"

"He said you were under thirty, and a woman with a hobby. I drew a picture of a gaunt, angular female, with a mania for lecturing on women's rights. He never contradicted me when I said so."

Bee was laughing.

"I think we had better have an act of mutual oblivion. I'll forget the unflattering portrait you drew of me if you'll try and not remember the horror with which uncle and I anticipated your arrival."

"Agreed."

"And of course you will dine with us. Why?"—smiling—"poor Uncle Will has gone to the hotel on purpose to invite you! We live

very plainly, but as I have an intimate acquaintance with the *menu of the table d'hôte*, I think I can venture to assert we aren't much worse."

It was a very pretty cottage. Mr. Carlyle had taken it furnished, so most of the surroundings were essentially German; but Bee had given it an English air by the addition of sundry pretty trifles and several glass vases filled with bright summer flowers. A neat English servant opened the door, and her face struck Rex as being strangely familiar. It flashed upon him at last he had seen her at Lady Carteret's.

"Uncle Will can't speak a word of German, so we brought Emma with us for his special benefit," said Miss St. John. "Isn't this a funny house?"

"I like it."

"So do I. Here's my uncle"—then, as Mr. Carlyle came to meet them—"should you ever have thought, uncle, that Mr. Ashwin's friend should have been my friend-in-need in the shower this morning?"

Rex came to the conclusion Mr. Carlyle was a charming old gentleman, and that Miss St. John quite deserved his old friend's praise. He persisted in thinking of Bee as a fellow-artist, utterly forgetting that she belonged to the species he had elected to hate. There was nothing unfeminine or strong-minded about Miss St. John, and yet Rex contrived to blind himself wilfully to the fact that she was a young lady.

When Emma was brushing out her mistress's hair that night she ventured on an observation.

"I never was so astonished as when I saw that gentleman, Miss St. John. Until I heard you introduce him to the master I could have sworn it was Captain Fairfax as Lady Helen was going to marry."

Bee started.

"Is there such a resemblance, Emma?"

"Yes, miss; and it's not in looks only, it's in everything; his voice is just the same. The Captain was the nicest gentleman I ever met—a deal too good for Lady Helen. They do say she's married a plain mister now, Miss St. John, just because he's rich."

Bee was a long time that night before she could sleep. She knew that Sir Reginald Fairfax had taken to artistic studies to console him for his false love, and she knew also that it is a common thing for artists to travel under assumed names. Before she slept that night she had solved all that puzzled her.

"Oh! you dear old match-maker!" she exclaimed, thinking of Mr. Ashwin, "did you possibly imagine by trying to throw us together under different names we could fall into your plans? Well, I need not be afraid of meeting 'Mr. Bertram' now, as his whole heart is Lady Helen's, and I never had a heart at all. I think we can be as intimate as we like without any fear of consequences."

And they were intimate. Uncle Will, who had spent most of his life in the Colonies, possessed very hazy ideas of a chaperon's duties; besides, his Beatrice hated young men, and shared his own disapproval of marriage, therefore what harm could come of letting her see a good deal of this handsome young artist?

So Bee finished her picture in the sweet September sunshine, but a strange fate seemed against Reginald's; he could not get on with it at all, and by-and-by he confided to Miss St. John he was sure landscapes were not in his line—would she not sit to him herself; with such a model he must succeed.

"I should not like to have my portrait exhibited."

"Then sit in character. Let me paint you as Marguerite or Elaine. Your face is just what one fancies the lily maid's to have been before her sorrows came."

"Before she believed in love. I think that is the beginning of all sorrow, Mr. Bertram."

"Don't you believe in it?"

"No."

"Really no?"

"I believe there is such a thing, and some unhappy people are destined to experience it, but I think the greater number are spared such a misfortune, and I am glad to be one of them."

"I don't agree with you. Miss St. John, I can't bear to hear you talk like that."

"Why not?"

"No good woman scoffs at love."

"Perhaps I am not a good woman."

"I am sure you are. Since I have known you my faith in womanhood has been restored. I used to think, because one had played me false, there was no such thing as truth or purity in the sex, but you have taught me better."

"Perhaps I shall convert you to my own faith yet."

"And that is?"

"That love is an unnecessary evil."

Mr. Carlyle gave his consent, and the sittings began. The pathetic style of Bee's face was just what Rex needed for the lily maid. The picture grew apace.

"Do you know," said Miss St. John, suddenly, one day, "fifteen months ago this picture would have been my exact likeness?"

"You were ill then."

"I was alone and in sorrow. My mother was dead, and I was working with my needle for daily bread."

"Miss St. John!"

"It is quite true. I've often wished to tell you. I wanted to see if you looked shocked. I lived in two miserable rooms in a cheap part of London, and I used to work from morning till night. At last one bright June day Uncle Will found me out, and I have been happy ever since. I shall always say the month of June brought me happiness?"

"And I used to think it the saddest in my life. Miss St. John, may I tell you why?"

"I think I know."

"Impossible!"

"Nay, you are Sir Reginald Fairfax. I have known it from the first evening you came here. Knowing that it is natural I should hear the rest, and I shall hear of some beautiful Lady Fairfax, and then I shall know you are consoled."

One morning Rex came to the cottage and found no beautiful model awaiting him. Emma said her mistress had gone for a ride.

"She expected you at eleven, sir, and told me she should be back long before that. She started at eight, and I expected her to breakfast at nine."

Rex felt uneasy, and started off at once in search of her, having learned the way she proposed to go, which was by a dangerous pass.

With passionate haste, with intense eagerness, he pursued his way. The dangerous spot was about two miles from the cottage, but Rex waited for no conveyance; he believed anxiety would give wings to his speed, and so he hurried on.

Just as he had feared, just what he had pictured to himself. There at the brow of the hill, at the steepest point of the descent, lay something very still.

His heart ached with a yearning longing. The face was white and motionless, the blue eyes were firmly closed. Were they to open again only on the resurrection morn?

"Beatrice!"

He bent over her, and took one of the still hands in his. Tearing off her gauntlet, he chafed the ice-cold fingers in his own.

"Beatrice!"

Still no answer, no response. He had brought a flask of brandy with him, and now he tried to insert some drops between her closely clenched teeth.

"Speak to me, my darling! Oh! Beatrice, look up and speak to me even if it is for the last time."

The brandy must have been effectual. She stirred faintly, and at this passionate appeal she half opened her blue eyes. There was a strange expression in their depths. She recognised him, and yet her mind seemed far

away. She had not quite come to herself; her spirit yet hovered on the borders of its prison-house.

"Beatrice!"

"I thought you would come."

"Are you hurt? Oh! Beatrice, how could you be so rash—you who are so precious?"

She was still wandering, though her words were audible, but spoken in a strange, dreary voice.

"I thought that it was death. Should you have been sorry, Reginald?"

He knew she was not herself, and yet the words filled him with a strange, passionate joy.

"Life would have had nothing left for me worth the living for."

"But you are here," said Bee, simply; "you belong to Lady Helen."

"I belong to no one in the world but you. Oh! Bee, my darling, I cannot let you die! Come back to me, and let me teach you to believe in love."

"I believe in it now," she whispered, faintly.

"But I am so tired. Kiss me, Rex."

And even as he pressed his lips passionately to hers the fear smote him that this caress, which she herself has asked for, may be his first and last.

Her head fell back upon his breast. He gathered her in his arms, and began his perilous descent, for with such a burden it was perilous indeed. He never quite remembered the details of that long walk; he only recollects Mr. Carlyle taking Beatrice from his arms, and calling on heaven to bless him.

Three, four days had passed since the accident, and from the moment when he placed her in her adopted father's arms Rex had never seen his Beatrice. He had heard of her constantly; knew that beyond a terrible shock to her whole system and a sprained ankle she was none the worse for her awful peril. The doctor enjoined perfect rest and freedom from excitement. So often as he called to inquire, Rex had never yet been invited to the invalid's presence.

But on this fourth evening he determined to take French leave, and invite himself. He could see Mr. Carlyle in the distance, watering his flowers, and he guessed that Bee had been carried into the drawing-room, and laid upon the sofa. So calmly opening the glass doors he walked straight into the hall, and then into his darling's room.

Bee blushed crimson; then she recollected herself, gave the artist her hand, and made some confused little speech of thanks and gratitude. Rex was not in the least taken in by it. He began to hope that his love was not all in vain, since his darling had lost her old ease and perfect freedom from restraint.

"Bee, why wouldn't you see me before?"

Bee was hard of hearing.

"I came three times each day, only to be denied. Don't you think it was a little hard?"

"Why were you in such a hurry?" asked Miss St. John, demurely. "Did you want to say good-bye?"

"Good-bye!"

"I thought you might be returning to England. You have been here a long time, you know."

"I shall never return to England until I have got something that I want."

She did not ask him what it was. [She just closed her eyes, as though the light was too strong for them.]

"Bee, don't you know what I want? Darling, won't you give yourself to me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You belong to Lady Helen."

"I shall never belong to anyone but you. Oh, my darling! because for a little while before I ever saw you I loved another woman will you condemn me to a lonely life?"

"And I don't believe in love."

"I am quite willing to undertake your conversion; it is such an easy creed, Bee!"

"Go away!"

"Do you mean it? Oh, child, if you send me remember it is for always, and I shall never be happy again! Bee, can't you care for me? Is my poverty so great a drawback?"

"I do care," she whispered, faintly, "and I should care just the same if you hadn't a penny; but I can't marry you."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't."

"Bee, we shall never understand each other like this. Tell me what is the barrier between us?"

No answer.

"Have you promised Mr. Carlyle to stay with him always? Is that it, Bee?"

"I think I promised it; but Uncle Will is prepared for me to break it. He has quite settled in his own mind we ought to be married, because you saved my life."

"I always thought Uncle Will a genius; I am quite sure of it now. Bee, there can't be any good reason for you to send me away?"

"There is."

"Then tell it me."

"You'll hate me."

"I'll take my chance of that."

"Dreadful consequences ensue if you marry me. Rex, I am Mary Fairfax!"

How he persuaded her that Mary Fairfax or Beatrice St. John alike she was dearest to him on earth—how the two confided the truth to Mr. Carlyle, and overcame his objections to Rex for his relationship to his sister's husband by the fact that Bee shared that misfortune—we need not dwell on here. Uncle Will was induced at last to smile on the engagement, and to declare it was all his own doing, and that he had planned it from first to last. The two young people are mildly incredulous on this latter statement, for both are too fond of the dear old gentleman to hurt his feelings by contradicting him.

So Rex was master of Fairfax Castle and its revenues after all, for within eighteen months of his uncle's death he was united to his second love, and married the only woman who could restore to him his birthright.

But Sir Reginald and Lady Fairfax can laugh at any suggestion that theirs is a marriage of convenience. Their perfect mutual love and confidence, the quiet domestic happiness that reigns at the old Castle, these tell anyone more plainly than mere words that Rex and Beatrice married for love's dear sake. Uncle Will lives with them, and vies with another old friend in spoiling the small people who run about the stately old house, and make its walls ring again with merriment.

This other friend, of course, is Mr. Ashwin, the prince of matchmakers, who is never tired of congratulating himself on the happy stratagem which brought the two cousins together, always ending up with a sigh of intense satisfaction and the words, "I saw it all, Mr. Carlyle. From the first time I set eyes upon your niece I knew she was REGINALD'S FATE."

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

"I LOVE your daughter better than I do my life," said he to her obstinate father. "Well," replied the heartless man, "go commit suicide and let her get rid of you. That won't be much of a proof, but it will be satisfactory to me."

GROCER: "Half a pound of tea? Which will you have, black or green?" SERVANT: "Shure, ayther will do. It's for an ould woman that's nearly blind."

GERTY was sent home from school the other day because she refused to do a sum. "Why didn't you obey the teacher?" said the correcting parent. "Because she knowed how to do it her own self, and there was no use my telling her," was the childish answer.

The following is the reply given by a prominent scholar. Teacher: "What are metaphoric rocks?" Pupil: "Metaphoric rocks are rocks containing metaphor."

A GRAND JUROR, having applied to the judge to be excused from serving on account of his deafness, the judge said: "Could you not hear my charge to the jury, sir?" "Yes, sir; I heard your honour's charge," said the juror; "but I couldn't make any sense of it." He was excused.

"YES," he said, dreamily, "we are always striving for a subjective goal. We lean over the verge of the infinite, longing to grasp its mysteries, and lost in the profundity of its immensity." "Yes," she replied thoughtfully; "but, John, would you mind my putting a brown patch on that old coat of yours?"

WIFE (to husband eating fish): "I should think you would be ashamed of yourself to get profane over a few bones. And in the presence of the children, too!" Husband (savagely): "A few bones! Blank it all, there's millions of 'em." Wife (consoling): "Well, what if there are? They are very small ones."

MISTRESS: "Why did you leave your last place?" SERVANT: "The lady ma'am, expected too much. She insisted on my keeping the household accounts." "That was nothing. You had the ability." "Oh, yes. But she wanted me so correct her spelling. That was asking a little too much."

AN actor, who was to enact the rôle of Horatio in a certain company came to rehearsal with a large lump of chalk. "What's that for?" demanded the leading man. "To mark the ghost with." "What do you mean?" "Does not Bernardo tell me to mark it, and how can I without a piece of chalk?"

"WELL," said a lawyer, as he entered his condemned client's cell, "good news at last. 'A reprieve?' eagerly exclaimed the prisoner. "No, not a reprieve, but your uncle has left you £500, and now you can meet your fate with the satisfying feeling that the noble efforts of your lawyer in your behalf will not go unrewarded."

A LADY recently discovered that her daughter was about to elope. She didn't make any fuss about it, but the night on which the elopement was to take place gave her daughter an opiate in her tea, so that the girl did not wake up till next morning. Meantime the lover had grown tired of waiting, and left in disgust.

SMALL BROTHER: "Where did you get that cake, Annie?" SMALL SISTER: "Mother gave it to me." SMALL BROTHER: "Ah! she always gives you more than me." SMALL SISTER: "Never mind; she's going to put mustard plasters on us when we go to bed to-night, and I'll ask her to let you have the biggest."

BLIGHTED AFFECTION.—"I have been unfortunate in love matters," said a well-known bass singer at the Paris Opera. "My first sweetheart entered a convent, death robbed me of the second, and the third—is now my wife?"

AN alderman once called on Dr. Abernethy, when the following dialogue took place: "Doctor, I have a strong tendency to the gout; what shall I do to arrest it?" "Take a bucket of water and a ton of coal three times a week." "How?" "Drink the former, and carry the latter up three pair of stairs."

ONE day, a little girl, about five years old, heard a ranting preacher praying most lustily, till the roof rang with the strength of his supplication. Turning to her mother, and beckoning the maternal ear down to a speaking place, she whispered, "Mother, don't you think that if he lived nearer to Heaven he wouldn't have to talk so loud?"

EXPERIENTIA DOCT.—Countess Jeanne to old dowager: "You don't congratulate me on my sister's marriage!" Dowager, with a slight shrug of her shoulders: "No, child, I reserve my congratulations until ten years after marriage."

SOCIETY.

GREAT interest it is said was evinced by the Queen and Princess Beatrice in the work of mercy engaged in by Miss Stewart in Bulgaria, and that lady was cordially welcomed to Osborne, and entreated to freely relate her experiences on the battle-fields and with the sick and wounded.

THE Princess Louise's Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders have been inspected by the Queen at Osborne, and marched back to Parkhurst Barracks well pleased that Her Majesty had complimented their commanding officer on their smartness.

HIS Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught has consented to preside at the annual festival dinner of the British Home for Incurables, on the 14th April, at Willis's Rooms.

THE wedding of the Duke of Braganza, the future King of Portugal, and the Princess Amelia of Orleans is to take place at Lisbon. It will provide a sumptuous show of millinery, and the pomp and ceremony will be considerable—altogether, an affair worth travelling a mile or two to see. Parisians, Republicans though they be, are grievously disappointed that the knot is not to be tied in their own gay city.

THE betrothal dinner was given at the Comte de Paris's town house, and would have been gay had not most of the ladies clung to their mourning for King Fernando. But they acted as admirable foils to Princess Amelia, who wore a lovely costume, of which the leading material was white satin.

THE marriage of Mr. William Robert Colomb, J.P., of Greystone, county Wicklow, with Miss Maude Lushington, fifth daughter of the late Mr. Charles Manners Lushington, and niece of the Earl of Iddesleigh, was a very pretty wedding.

THE bride's four little nieces, who acted as bridesmaids, were prettily dressed in white satin, veiled with white lace, wore wreaths of snowdrops in their hair and tulle veils, and carried posies of snowdrops and violets; each wore a gold bangle, the bridegroom's gift.

THE bride was charmingly dressed in white satin, draped and trimmed with Brussels lace and orange blossom, wore a wreath of natural bridal flowers, and a tulle veil; her ornaments were of diamonds, and she carried an enormous bouquet; her train, which was very long, was held by her three nephews—Master John Coleridge and Masters Godfrey and Stephen Phillimore—who were dressed in suits of blue velvet, with point lace collars.

A VERY stylish marriage was that of Mr. Ailwyn E. Fellowes, second son of Mr. and Hon. Mrs. Fellowes, of Ramsay Abbey, Huntingdon, and Haverland Hall, Norfolk, with the Hon. Agatha Joliffe, only daughter of Lord Hylton.

THE six bridesmaids wore pretty dresses of white striped silk and crêpe de Chine, bordered round the throat and wrists with beaver fur, and their hats, which were entirely covered with white ostrich feathers, were lined with velvet and trimmed with pompons to match the fur. Each wore an enamelled brooch, and carried a bouquet of red and white flowers, the bridegroom's gifts.

THE bride was richly attired in white terry velvet, the train being very full and plain, and the front draperies edged with a deep fringe of orange blossom. She wore a wreath of the same flowers in her hair, and a veil of fine old Brussels lace, attached by diamond and ruby pins, the gift of the bridegroom's mother.

HER other ornaments included a diamond brooch, one of the bridegroom's presents, and a diamond and ruby bracelet, given by the Hon. Mrs. Fellowes.

LADY Hylton looked well in deep ruby velvet, bordered with cinchilla, and bonnet to match.

STATISTICS.

MORTALITY STATISTICS FOR 1885.—The Registrar-General, in his return for the last quarter of last year, gives the following summary for the twelve months: During the four quarters of 1885 893,694 births and 522,517 deaths were registered in England and Wales. The natural increase of population during the year by excess of births over deaths was 371,177, against 367,725 and 376,623 in 1883 and 1884. The death rate, which had been 18.9, 19.6, 19.5 and 19.6 in the preceding four years, declined again last year to 19.0. The rates in these five years were lower than in any previous year since civil registration was enacted in 1837. Thus the annual rate in the first half of the current decennium (1881-90) averaged only 19.3, and was 2.1 below the mean rate of the preceding ten years, 1871-80. This reduction in the death rate implies that more than 281,000 persons in England and Wales have survived the last five years, whose deaths would have been recorded had the mean rate of mortality been equal to that prevailing in the ten years 1871-80. The deaths included 12,558 from diarrhoea, 14,103 from measles, 12,271 from whooping-cough, 6,188 from scarlet fever, 5,657 from "fever" (including typhus, enteric, and simple or ill-defined), 4,161 from diphtheria, and 2,788 from small-pox. Thus 57,726 deaths were referred to these principal zymotic diseases, showing a decrease of 14,036 from the number returned in 1884.

GEMS.

WILL-POWER is to be cultivated. It can, like the memory, be strengthened by unceasing practice.

IT is no good reason for a man's religion that he was born and brought up in it; for then a Turk would have as much reason to be a Turk as a Christian a Christian.

WATER that flows from a spring does not freeze in the coldest winter. And those sentiments of true friendship which flow from the heart cannot be frozen by adversity.

THE past is disclosed, the future concealed in doubt. And yet human nature is heedless of the past, and fearful of the future—regarding not the science and experience that past ages have unveiled.

HE who indulges his sense in any excesses renders himself obnoxious to his own reason; and to gratify the brute in him, displeases the man, and sets his two natures at variance.

IF you are willing to be as pleasant and as anxious to please in your own home as you are in the company of your neighbours, you will have the happiest home in the world.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FRIED BREAD.—Crumb stale bread as for dressing; mix with several well-beaten eggs; form it into small cakes, and fry brown in hot butter.

BAKED ONIONS.—Wash but do not peel the onions; boil an hour in salt water, changing the water twice. When tender, peel, lay in a baking-pan and bake an hour and a half. Serve with melted butter.

BROWN BREAD.—One quart of corn meal, one pint of rye meal, one-quarter of a cup of treacle, one teaspoonful of soda dissolved in hot water, one half teaspoonful of salt; mix soft with boiling water and bake.

ROAST FOWLS.—Fowls require constant attention in dredging and basting; and, during the last ten minutes, let butter rolled in flour be stuck over them in little bits, and allowed to melt, without basting. The gravy for fowls should always be thickened, and slightly flavoured with lemon-juice. Sausages or rolled bacon should be served on the same dish, and white mashed potatoes always be handed with poultry.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ARE you surprised to find how independent of money peace of conscience is, and how much happiness can be condensed in the humblest home? A cottage will not hold the bulky furniture and sumptuous accommodations of a mansion; but if God be there, a cottage would hold as much happiness as might stock a palace.

PARVISHNESS is generally the vice of narrow minds, and, except when it is the effect of anguish and disease, by which the resolution is broken and the mind made too feeble to bear the lightest addition to its miseries, proceeds from an unreasonable regard of the importance of trifles. The proper remedy against it is to consider the dignity of human nature and the folly of suffering perturbation and uneasiness from causes unworthy of our notice.

A LESSON IN COLOUR.—There is a lesson in colour in a shop window lined with dark carpets and draperies, and lighted by a yellow vase holding a dusky-leaved plant, and it would be well if everybody would read it aright. There is no reason why the sunniest of tints should be left to the artists, although everybody cannot hope to be so fortunate in producing effects as one fair Boston painter, who, with a tangle of golden and blood-red leaves hanging from the chandelier, a yellow Japanese sunshade intercepting the sunlight, a yellow cushion here and a tile there, has made a desert of Pompeian red and dusk-olive blossom like the rose.

UNTRUTHFUL PROTESTATIONS.—About the formal termination of our letters there is much untruth. Formality is doubtless always more or less false; but it seems a pity and a mistake that civilisation should prompt us to utter falsehoods. Seeing then that very frequently not one of these affectionate phrases have an atom of truth in them, would it not do just as well to terminate with the name of the writer and a greeting, the same as though we had met our acquaintance in the street? Face to face no one would pretend to talk such nonsense. Fancy such a thing as telling half-a-dozen men that we were truly theirs, and a dozen others that we were ever theirs sincerely, and our receiving similar protestations every time we met! Foreigners kissing and hugging in the streets would be nothing to it. Yet we write the nonsense we should be above expressing verbally. What we think to be necessary politeness in a letter we should consider ridiculous formality, and an absurd parade of words if they were exchanged in person.

AN INGENIOUS CORRESPONDENCE.—A correspondence with hair was once attempted between a notorious Parisian thief in durance vile and his comrades outside. A letter was sent to the prisoner from his sweetheart, containing merely a lock of hair wrapped in the leaf of a book. The jailer did not consider the souvenir important enough to be delivered, but in a few days there came a similar inclosure, and yet another. This aroused suspicion, and the governor took the matter in hand. He examined the leaf of the book; it was that of a common novel, twenty-six lines on a page. Then he studied the hair and noticed the small quantity of the gift. Counting the hairs he found them of unequal length and twenty-six in number, the same as the lines on the page. Struck with the coincidence, he laid the hairs along the lines on the page which they respectively reached, beginning at the top with the smallest hair. After some trouble he found that the end of each hair pointed to a different letter, and that these letters combined, formed a slang sentence, which informed the prisoner that his friends were on the watch, and that the next time he left the prison to be examined an attempt would be made to rescue him. The governor made his plans accordingly. The attempt was made, but the rescuers fell into their own trap.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- G. C. C.—1. No. 2. Jan. 17, 1877, fell on Wednesday.
 G. N.—1. and 2. No record of their ancestry. 3. The author is unknown. 4. Not to our knowledge.
- J. B.—We can only aid you by suggesting that you advertise in the daily papers.
- A. A.—Malted beef-marrow is recommended to stop the hair from falling off.
- JULIET A.—We cannot inform [you] where the gentleman resides.
- VALERIAN.—1. We are not acquainted with the genius. 2. Yes, the bedroom is the proper place.
- M. F. W.—A will does not require any stamp. An ordinary agreement should bear a sixpenny stamp.
- B. W. M.—The poem entitled "The Story of the Faithful Soul," was written by Adelaide Procter.
- H. M. G.—You have doubtless seen the statement that business addresses are debarred from publication in these columns.
- G. W.—Consult a first-class medical practitioner, who will give you advice regarding the proper treatment of the lung troubles.
- H. R. C.—Saturday, February 16, 1861. Both of the other dates mentioned—August 11, 1865, and December 13, 1867—came on a Friday.
- L. L.—Consult one of the first-class upholsterers in the city, who will give you many valuable hints concerning the proper furnishing of a house.
- G. G.—Yes. Pans were known to the ancients. In the British Museum are fan-handles, and other articles of Egyptian manufacture, used anciently by women.
- C. C.—1. A cubic foot of air weighs 525 grains. 2. Every person needs about 550 cubic feet of air every twenty-four hours.
- C. F. B.—The article for which you inquire can be procured from any local dealer in lamps and house-furnishing goods.
- M. M. M.—1. The letters stand for 1750, the Roman numerals for 23. 2. The 27th September, 1865, fell on a Monday.
- B. V. P.—1. Take some cooling medicine, live regularly and plainly, and have plenty of exercise in the open air. 2. Moderate.
- G. C.—*Paterfamilias* is the Latin for the master, head, or father of the family. *Materfamilias* is the lady, mistress, or good wife of the house, the mother of a family.
- LETITIA.—We regret the fact that we have been unable to ascertain the authorship of the quotation. It cannot be found in any standard book devoted to such subjects.
- G. A. B.—According to the best authorities, the Koh-i-noor diamond originally weighed between 798 and 800 carats, but by several cuttings and recuttings has been reduced to 106 1-6 carats.
- M. M.—The singer named is, we believe, performing in Berlin at the present time. The whereabouts of eminent actors, actresses and other professionals, will be found duly chronicled in any of the dramatic papers.
- G. G.—We would willingly give you the desired address, but under no circumstances are business addresses inserted here, as they virtually amount to an advertisement.
- W. B.—1. Fully up to the average. 2. Very dark brown hair of fine texture. 3. A girl aged fourteen years should weigh about 100 pounds and stand about five feet high in her stocking feet.
- CLARA.—Visitors are supposed to first greet the host or hostess of the house visited, although in the majority of cases the salutations are simultaneous. Under no circumstances should the visitor wait until first addressed by his friend.
- ALBA.—A good remedy for itching feet from frost-bites is hydrochloric acid, one ounce; soft water, seven ounces. Wash the feet with the preparation two or three times daily, or wet the socks with it until relieved.
- T. H.—Any instrument maker will furnish strings for your violin, and impart to you the information desired, but you can hardly hope to achieve success as a musician if you have no musical taste or talent, even with the aid of an experienced and skilful instructor.
- P. N.—The father of your adored having expressed his dislike for you in such a forcible manner, discretion should teach you to keep away from the house until his wrath has become softened. This desirable change in his feelings may possibly be brought about by means of the persuasive eloquence of his daughter, (who must certainly have a great deal of influence over him, provided she is a good and dutiful child).
- G. M. W.—1. The orchids are of a large family of plants. Popularly any plant of the family, of whatever genus, is called an orchid. They are found in nearly all countries except those upon the borders of the frozen zone, and those of excessive dryness. They are among the most valued of cultivated flowers, and some for their beauty, others for their fragrance, and others for their grotesque forms. The flowers of one species are quite like the mouth of a cuttle fish, in others the resemblance to a large spider is equally strong, and on several species the flowers almost exactly imitate various

insects. Some orchids are remarkable for the duration of their flowers, which in floral decorations renders them of special value. 2. In reference to Robert Browning's poem, "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," there is no historical foundation for it whatever. It is all purely fanciful. 3. The sentence quoted is the French for "I do not understand you." 4. We have no personal knowledge of them.

E. S.—Shakespeare is supposed to have borrowed the witch incantations in *Macbeth* from Thomas Middleton's play of *The Witch*. They were contemporary dramatists. Middleton was associated with Jonson, Fletcher, Massinger, and Rosalby, in the composition of several plays.

M. W.—Henry VII. was crowned, king at the battle of Bosworth Field, which was the thirteenth and last battle between the houses of York and Lancaster. The battle was fought on August 22, 1485. The crown—that of Richard III.—was found, it is said, in a hawthorn bush near the field.

J. F. D.—You are placed in a most unfortunate position. You could obtain employment, perhaps, as a copyist or law writer, but you would have to improve your handwriting and become acquainted with the particular style wanted. If you know anyone in a lawyer's office they might help you.

L. D.—1. The gentleman named was stricken with paralysis a few weeks ago; but, according to the latest accounts, he is recovering rapidly. The daily papers will keep you apprised of his movements from time to time. 2. Mikado is pronounced as though spelled Mee-kah-do, the second syllable being accented.

S. T. T.—If a girl's parents support her properly she has no reason to feel aggrieved because she is not allowed to earn her own living by daily labour. It is nonsensical for her to imagine that they can be compelled, by any legal process, to pay her a stipulated sum weekly in lieu of the permission to do as she pleases in the matter of work.

WHEREVER YOU MAY BE.

Oh, chide me not, my well-beloved,
 Nor call my heart untrue;
 In every pulse, it has been proved
 Most faithful unto you.

Where'er you are, these centres all
 Of happiness for me;
 The skies are only beautiful
 Wherever you may be.

Your love to me is what the light
 Of sun is to the day;
 Were it withdrawn it would be night
 For ever round my way.

Then tell me not that I have changed,
 My heart has grown untrue—
 From others it may be estranged,
 But never, love, from you.

H. A. M.

F. L. L.—1. Turn your attention from one who is so sickle. A man who will speak to a lady at one time and treat her with silent contempt at another, lacks gentlemanly breeding, and is no fit associate for ladies. 2. The look is of a dark-auburn hue, and the mass from which it was cut doubtless greatly enhances the beauty of the face and figure of its possessor.

ROSIE A.—1. The quotation will be found in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. 2. The rule is for the bride to stand on the left of the bridegroom during the marriage ceremony. 3. This question being a political one, it cannot be answered in this column. 4. Perhaps a local bookseller can get the book for you, provided it is not on his shelves. 5. Refer to the daily papers for advertisements of the firms for which you require. 6. Thursday, April 13, 1861.

G. G.—The use of birdlime for snaring birds is a relic of barbarism, and is exceedingly cruel. From the fact that many of them so trapped are allowed to die by slow torture in some out-of-the-way places to which they have dragged themselves. Unable to get food or water, they gradually starve to death, and all to gratify an unsportsmanlike desire to obtain easy possession of them. This is the reason why we always refuse to publish a recipe for making this compound.

M. R. M.—1. It is decidedly wrong for a married lady to enter into a flirtation with any gentleman of her acquaintance, as she thus places her good name and happiness in jeopardy. It is hard to conceive how a woman who is true to herself and her marriage vows can consider flirting an amusement, as, when doing so, she is in reality standing on the brink of a precipice over which she may fall at any instant and be plunged into a gulf of irretrievable dishonour. 2. She is very pretty. 3. Very neat, legible penmanship.

L. O. S.—1. To stain wood light mahogany, brush over the surface with diluted nitrous acid, and, when dry, apply the following, with a soft brush: Dragon's blood, four ounces; common soda, one ounce; spirit of wine, three pints. Let it stand in a warm place, shake frequently, and then strain. Repeat the application until the proper colour is obtained. 2. To stain dark mahogany colour, boil half a pound of madder and two ounces of logwood in one gallon of water; then brush the wood well over with the hot liquid. When dry, go over the wood with a solution of two drams of pearl ash in one quart of water. 3. To imitate rosewood, boil half a pound of logwood in three pints of water until it is of a very dull red; then add half an ounce of salt of

tartar (carbonate of potassa). While boiling hot, stain the wood with two or three coats; then with a stiff flat brush form streaks with the black stain, which is thus made: Boil one pound of logwood in four quarts of water, and add a double handful of walnut peel or shells; boil it up again, take out the chips, and add one pint of the best vinegar. Apply boiling hot. 4. To stain walnut colour, take boiled linseed oil and bennine, in equal quantities, and add burnt umber, ground in linseed oil, until you get the stain as dark as you desire. Apply with a soft brush.

L. D. D.—1. The whitest wool known in commerce is that of the Angora goat, termed mohair. The fleece, weighing from two to four pounds, and free from under down, is very silky, and hanging in curls of an average length of five inches. The wool of the Cashmere goat, which is the under coat, is short, but soft, and lustrous. The trouble of separating it, fibre by fibre, from the hair or "hemp" of the outer coat, is extremely tedious, and is one cause of the high price of Cashmere shawls. 2. Great Britain is the greatest wool market in the world.

L. C.—The Sabines were an ancient people of Italy. They were migratory, and early spread over the central region of the country. They embraced a large number of tribes, and were renowned for their courage, simple manners, religious character, and love of freedom. In times of war they were ruled by dictators or kings; in peace by republican magistrates. They are made very conspicuous in the legends and history of Rome. Early in the third century B.C. they received the full Roman franchise and were finally merged in the republic.

F. F.—Your sister is the best judge of her ability, and consequently it is decidedly impolite to force your opinions upon her unless she asks you to do so. Her ideas concerning the stage are very sensible ones, and she does right in telling you that though she has made a success as an amateur actress she does not consider herself warranted in studying for the professional stage. You had better pay more attention to personal affairs, and thus prevent any chance of the family dissensions described in your communication.

LUNA R.—The moon is the nearest of the heavenly bodies to us. By means of the telescope she has been brought to within 150 miles of us. Though the moon's surface has no obvious indications of water, nor of an atmosphere, it has been maintained by one observer that she has a slight atmosphere, and that she has also water in the shape of numerous ponds, which for optical reasons are not always visible through the telescope, but have occasionally been noticed by astronomers as bright, sparkling spots. Be this as it may, the general surface of the moon is said to present a scene of great desolation, like the country around volcanoes on the earth.

LADY R.—1. The following is given as a black colour for straw of any kind, but especially for straw hats; the quantities of material are given for twenty-five hats or bonnets: they are kept for two hours in a boiling decoction of four pounds of logwood, one pound of sumach, and five ounces of fustic; and afterwards dipped into a solution of sulphate of iron of four degrees Baume; then well rinsed with water, and, when dry, are painted over with a solution of lac or dextrine. 2. A complete practical guide for job dyers can be furnished for 50 cents. 3. There is nothing that will prevent the growth of superfluous hair without injury to the skin. If removed it will grow again, and be thicker and coarser than before. Let it alone.

S. H. T.—1. The treatment of baldness consists in attention to cleanliness, and in exciting the languid circulation of the scalp to greater activity by using a stiff hairbrush, after washing the head in cold water night and morning. At the same time the system should be kept in good condition by a regular mode of living, by tonics and by regular exercise. Sometimes shaving of the head will prove beneficial. 2. The use of tobacco is not quoted as a cause of baldness, and consequently you can rest easy on that score, although this practice may act injuriously on your digestion, and thus enervate your nervous system. Then, again, the baldness may arise from a faulty nutrition of the upper portion of the scalp, caused by atrophy of the hair follicles, in which case it would be useless to attempt to remedy the trouble. Persons afflicted with severe attacks of neuralgia, or suffering from the effects of high fevers, are also very apt to lose their hair. The remedy described above is recommended in all such cases.

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